

Native Colonialism



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Preface

BY Professor Ephraim Isaac*

Many books have been written about education in Ethiopia. Yet, they mostly focus on a one-sided consideration of modern education, its methodology, relevance, and use. Few have seen the need to critically evaluate the development of modern education in Ethiopia. In particular, they neglect an important component: the role of tradition.

Since the late 19th century, Ethiopia simply duplicated western education to modernize without due consideration of the importance of traditional learning. Some, including myself, have at times expressed concerns regarding the indiscriminate adoption of modern western education in Ethiopia. What some call modernization has come at the cost of a total neglect of traditional learning – or, the lack of balance in incorporating traditional humanistic Ethiopian teachings and the important and valuable aspects of western scientific education. Yirga is the first person I know who has systematically analyzed the problems created by this shortsighted educational philosophy in modern Ethiopia.

Traditional education has a long history in Ethiopia going back to the time of the translation of the Bible into the Ge'ez language in the fifth century. Ge'ez (Classical Ethiopic) is one of the first seven languages of the world into which the Bible was translated (see my article “The Bible in Ethiopia” in *New Cambridge History of the Bible*, Richard Marsden, et. al eds. Cambridge Univ. Press, 2012). Ethiopia has a veritable traditional educational system based on a wide range of ancient Hebrew, Aramaic,

* Dr. Ephraim Isaac's latest book is *The Ethiopian Orthodox Tawahido Church*, 2013, Trenton, N.J: The Red Sea Press, Inc.

Greek, Syriac, and other literary works. Their total neglect in modern Ethiopia has created some confusion among the youth who are proud to be Ethiopian, on one hand, but confused about its culture, on the other. In other words, almost all Ethiopians feel proud of their history, but at the same time they look down upon their traditional culture and values. This is what the author rightly defines as centerlessness, a form of alienation where one feels isolated from their tradition but is not granted a place in the new western system.

This book makes a unique contribution to the fundamental problems facing the Ethiopian educational system, past and present. The author has an excellent grasp of the system of modern Ethiopian education. He also has a firsthand knowledge of traditional Ethiopia learning systems. Dr. Yirga's book is based on an extensive examination of relevant traditional literature and ethnography. His examination of Ethiopic literature, particularly the *Kebra Nagast* with additional references to other important works like the *Hate taZe Zara Yacob*, in analyzing the relevance of modern Ethiopian education is an original and creative idea. His interview with traditional teachers and religious leaders in Lalibela augments his knowledge of the primary literature and understanding of Ethiopian educational problems.

To my knowledge this is the first extensive analysis of the history of education in Ethiopia and a rational and balanced account of tradition vs. modernization. Directly or indirectly, this book challenges the philosophy of the Ethiopian Ministry of Education. The author does not deny the importance of western education for Ethiopia. To the contrary, he has himself benefitted from it. But his critical analysis of the pros and cons of the value of western education points to a much-needed reform in Ethiopia. Yirga indirectly calls on Ethiopian educators to examine the nature, purpose, and extent of traditional Ethiopian education and the need for its incorporation in the educational system.

In short, I commend this book enthusiastically. It is an original work with many creative ideas for change. In this respect, it is a work relevant for use by leaders and educators of Ethiopia, for whom it should be required reading.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my deepest respect and appreciation to my colleagues at the Centre for Human Rights Education at Curtin University. I appreciate the incredibly enabling and congenial academic space created for study and research at the Centre. In particular, I thank Caroline for believing in me when I first joined the Centre as a student and for guiding me through my PhD journey, together with Dr Karen Soldatic and Associate Professor Mary Anne Kenny. I also thank Professor Baden Offord for the insightful conversations, suggestions and unre-served support all throughout the period I was writing this book.

I would like to acknowledge the traditional school teachers and their students at Lalibela who taught me so many great lessons. I am grateful to Professor Ephraim Isaac who inspired me to value traditions ever since my years at Addis Ababa University and while working with Afroflag Youth Vision. I am also thankful for his constructive feedback and for encouraging me to write this book.

I thank my friends in Ethiopia and Australia for their encouragement and support. I am especially grateful to Feker Beyene, Monika Sommer, Eskedar Almaw, Dr Anteneh Mesfin, Dr Ainalem Nega and my beautiful twins Selam and Mihret.

Last but not least, my special love and thanks goes to my partner Dr Rebecca Louise Higgie for her patience in editing the manuscript and for having fruitful conversations on its content.



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Introduction

We do not live in space, we live in places. To live is to live locally, and to know is first of all to know the places one is in (Casey, 1996, p. 18).

There is no exaggeration to the saying that when an old person dies in Africa, a library burns down to the ground. The proverb implies that African educational institutions have little or no record of the wisdom and experience of their traditional scholars. The proverb also applies to the current Ethiopian condition where traditional scholars are excluded from the formal system despite long years of study in the intellectual legacy of their country. Growing up in the historic town of Lalibela, I had the opportunity to closely observe the lives of these scholars. They are the cultural leaders of the people. They spend decades of learning in places like Gondar and Gojam, studying in the traditional education system which is just one of many rich indigenous knowledge traditions in Ethiopia. In the community, they resolve conflicts, advise the young, comfort the sick, and pray for the dead as well as the living. They give shelter and free education for students who come to study with them, as they were received by others before them. Inside the 13th century monolithic churches of Lalibela, their singing and dancing seem to bring the beauty and wisdom of the past into a simultaneous existence with the present. Yet, these cultural leaders, like all other traditional leaders in the country, are not active participants in the political and economic life of the country. There is a strange aloofness between culture and politics in Ethiopia. In a country where more than 85% of the people live according to the dictates of local tradition, traditional scholars are not active participants in contemporary decision-making processes.

In an effort to encourage intergenerational dialogue between elders and youth, Afroflag Youth Vision, a local NGO, initiated a series

of conferences in 2006. The action was inspired by Professor Ephraim Isaac's advice that the new Ethiopian millennium, which would be celebrated in 2008 (2000 according to the Ethiopian Calendar), should be an opportunity for the country's renaissance through the active inclusion of its traditional wisdoms. However, in 2008, the celebration of the Ethiopian Millennium was dominated by an interest to renew Ethiopia's image in the eyes of the world. It focused on activities that would please tourists and the diaspora, including a paid concert by American singer Beyoncé Knowles rather than the voice of traditional wisdoms and elders. The events show that elites and policy makers consider Ethiopia's indigenous traditions, calendar, language, and history to be cultural relics, not dynamic forms of knowledge that could inspire change and enrich the education of its current generation. Afroflag's conferences generated ideas that questioned the relevance of Ethiopia's current education system to the tradition and way of life of the people. One participant questioned its contribution, saying "education should study and improve the tools with which we do things. But, throughout my life, I haven't heard of any contribution of such kind from our universities. Can you tell us what universities teach our children to improve our lives?" Such critical questions are important in light of the degradation of the lives of most rural communities in the country and their environments. My own recent observation of the places around Lalibela speaks to this degradation. Much of the landscape is now robbed of its greenery, many of the small rivers that once threaded through the surrounding gorges have dried up, the few big trees that stood once at the places called *guro*, *erigu shola* and *metafet* have perished, and the land is scarred with haphazardly built houses that suggest high population growth. Elders, orphans and disabled persons do not have any support from the state. Despite the lack of meaningful contribution to local life, state education is still celebrated because it is a supposedly "good thing" in and of itself, not because it has brought good things to the poor who make up the majority of Ethiopia's population.

The education system has been significantly expanding in recent years, though research suggests that it is also heading "from crisis to the brink of collapse" (Negash, 2006). Education is always linked in positive ways to the lives of the people, to their future and destiny. This book attempts to show that beneath the good name of education, there is a

constant violence against local traditions that perpetuates the degradation of the lives of the majority whose survival depend those on traditions. The belief in the redemptive power of western education is informed by a colonialist worldview that local traditions and people are primitive. It is also an indictment that privileges westernized elites to speak and act for the rural majority without the latter's consent. Through a critical analysis of historical, archival and empirical sources, including rare interviews with traditional and western educated scholars, and a critical-reflexive approach towards my own position as an individual who benefited from the formal education system, this book presents a theory that explains the violence of modern institutions. The central thesis of the book is this: Ethiopia has never been colonized by an alien political power, but a political system similar to colonialism has been institutionalized in the country by native colonizers. The western political ideology of the elite class has become the source of economic, political and social policy. Political parties determine development processes, and modernization is seen as a government-sponsored project rather than an evolutionary process that emerges from people's local experiences. Education has played a central role for the emergence and expansion of native colonialism. It promotes a worldview and culture that produces colonial consciousness. This book critically articulates the historical emergence, ideology and effect of native colonialism. It also attempts to present an interpretation of Ethiopia's rich legacy of traditional philosophy and wisdom as a source of insight for the production of relevant education for the future.

The book follows one of Ethiopia's indigenous knowledge traditions that survived for thousands of years through the education system of the *Tewahido* Church and traditional life of the people. In addition to the contribution of the church, some Ethiopians and foreign scholars have made great efforts to save the wisdom of our ancestors from the native colonialist drive of our own elites. For example, Aleqa Asres Yenesew, who is one of the prominent scholars of the traditional school, has documented the principles and values of Ethiopian identity from the *Tewahido* Christian tradition and the danger of mental colonization by the West (1959 [1951 EC]-a). In a similar vein, Claude Sumner's interpretation of Ethiopian philosophy, including that of the 17th Century philosophers Zara Yacob and Walda Hiwot, is a tremendous work that invites readers to the rich legacy of traditional philosophy in the country (1976). The

work of Asmarom Legesse on the Gada system of the Oromo is a notable example that shows the rich diversity of indigenous knowledge in Ethiopia (1973). Kidanewold Kifle, Desta Teklewold, Hiruy Woldelessie, Haddis Alemayehu, Tekletsadik Mekuria, Richard Pankhurst, Getachew Haile and Abera Jembere are among the few scholars who have written on Ethiopia's diverse indigenous conceptions, stories and language. In addition to providing an in depth understanding of Ethiopia's ancient knowledges, Professor Ephraim Isaac has been a practitioner of traditional wisdom and methods. He has been engaged in teaching young people and attempting to reconcile radical political opponents using traditional methods. The contribution of these and many other scholars and elders on the history, philosophy and tradition of Ethiopia provide indispensable context to closely examine the relevance of western knowledge and education from the perspective of Ethiopia's tradition and culture. I follow some of the interpretations and suggestions offered by the above scholars, together with empirical information gathered in Ethiopia, to present my arguments on native colonialism in Ethiopia.

My effort is to provide a critical reading of the metaphysical empire of western knowledge that has been imposed upon Ethiopia in the name of education. The best way to show the violence of this empire is not to reason based on its own rationalities. This is what most commentators did when they criticize the quality or relevance of the education system. They often start from the education system, not from the meaning of education. They focus on evaluating the performances and activities of the education system based on the goals and theories set by it. They focus on issues such as coverage, access, and resources, and measure the relevance and quality of its practice to a set of fixed objectives by the system. Although these may have positive outcomes, it presents the education system as a self-contained metaphysical entity whose relevance and significance is beyond question. Consequently, it pays little attention to the relevance of the content, process, outcome and vision of the education system itself to the knowledge, experience and interest of the local people concerned. It fails to consider whose knowledge is being packaged for distribution through the education system. This failure contributes to the continuation of the metaphysical empire of the West and its violence against local traditions. I argue that the best way to show this violence is to commit oneself to an earnest endeavor to *enter* and

stand on the epistemic fields that are suppressed by its violent presence with a reflexive practice that recognizes the shortcomings of this entry. Presenting the intimate experiences and knowledges of others in this way could be seen “as putting oneself into someone else’s skin” (Geertz, 1983, p. 56). However, my claim of entry is not to represent the exact words and experiences of those suppressed knowledges but to critically and adequately inform *my own* interpretative perspectives and experiences with theirs while writing on the topic. In the process of doing this, I have taken the time to get the perspectives, experiences, knowledges and suggestions of so many people in Ethiopia including traditional scholars, students and teachers as presented in the book. Yet, I consider it to be important that the common myth of objectivity as a disconnection between the author’s own experience and his/her work should be avoided. While objectivity could become the aspiration of any genuine scholarship, the author cannot interpret social reality without referring back to his/her own subjective experiences and values. Therefore, it is important to provide readers with a short reflection of my experience in relation to the topic.

Reflection and Book Summary

My view on the relationship between tradition and education developed through lived experience and research. I was born at the town of Lalibela where I started my educational journey with the study of numeracy and literacy at a traditional school (*Nibab Bet*) from the late Seregela Abate. Then, I studied in the government school from elementary to grade 10 during the previous *Derg* period, and from grade 11 through to my undergraduate degree in Law during the current EPRDF rule. During my early school years, I grew up in close relationship with rural life and places with practical exposure to farming and related activities. Although I did not complete a higher level of study in the traditional school, I became an active leader in the youth Sabbath schools and my leadership role and personal interest created a desire to learn the scriptures and language of the *Tewahido* tradition. I still have memories of my classes on the interpretation of traditional scriptures, *tirguaamme*, with the late Aba Zekarias Wassie; the study of local history with Afememihir Alebachew Reta; my late-night Ge’ez reading and rehearsing classes with

Merigeta Mekonin; scripture Sabbath classes with Aba Ketsela and the late Merigeta Gebremariam and others. The great melodist and vocalist the late Riese Debir Gebre Maskal Amagnu and the passionate teacher Lique Kahinat Kassie Setegne were sources of inspiration and passion for my interest in traditional knowledge. Before I finished high school, this interest took me to the Monastery of Daga Estifanos at the island of Lake Tana where I spent a brief time of communal living with the monks there. Later, after finishing year 10, I was trained as a Health Assistant and worked at remote rural clinics, an opportunity that enabled me to work at one of the country's rural villages. These experiences informed my extra-curricular activities when I later joined the Law faculty of the Addis Ababa University. I started to work at the students' clinic providing first aid and referral services during non-office hours. My role as the Chairman of the literature club for two years following the 1999 student protest and later as Director of Afroflag Youth Vision, a national NGO working to enhance the civic engagement and leadership role of youth in the country, enabled me to be actively engaged with the ideas, passions and challenges of my generation.

It was during my legal training and my teaching career as a law lecturer that I dimly started to perceive the strange contradiction between university education and rural culture in Ethiopia. Although Ethiopian laws are legislated and applied in Amharic, Ethiopian lawyers are trained in English. While English, French or Latin philosophical sources are referenced and the history of Europe is emphasized, Ge'ez or Oromo sources of Ethiopian philosophy and history have been neglected. Both in the first year of university and at law school, western philosophers were presented as biblical figures who spoke universal, neutral and objective truths. My travel to join my family in Australia gave me a comparative perspective and reflective space to critically engage with my own assumptions. In particular, my Masters training at the Centre for Human Rights Education at Curtin University encouraged me to draw insights from a range of critical theories that ultimately led me to conduct a PhD study on the relevance and significance of education in Ethiopia. My ongoing teaching and research experience, which involves interaction with several colleagues and postgraduate students, gave me the privilege of accessing information that facilitated the production of this book.

This book, though informed by my own experience, is the product of significant empirical research and an examination of Ethiopian history, literature and philosophy. The empirical research took place from 2010-2014 and involved observation of traditional schools, high school and university classes, and interviews with teachers and students in both the state and the traditional Ethiopian school systems. The book starts by examining the legacy of traditional knowledge in Ethiopia. In Chapter 1, it presents a theoretical reflection on the meaning of epistemic location and epistemic violence and a brief observation of how the literature approaches the relevance of tradition to education. Chapter 2 presents the conceptual and traditional basis of political and social life in Ethiopia based on the Kebra Nagast. It demonstrates that covenant and wisdom provided a theory of place and knowledge that guided political and social life for several centuries in Ethiopia. Chapter 3 examines the traditional education system and the intellectual legacy of the country. It presents the process of education and *tirguaamme*, the indigenous methodology of knowledge production. Both Chapter 2 and 3 demonstrate that Ethiopia has indigenous sources of knowledge that could have been used for making state education relevant to the lives of its people. Chapter 4-5 examine the process of westernization and the institutionalization of violence against tradition across two historical periods. Chapter 4 presents the beginning of Ethiopia's transition from kingdom to Elitdom (a system of elite autocracy) through epistemic violence against tradition. It examines the onset of a western consciousness of power as the precondition for violence against tradition from 1860s to 1960s. It also presents the imitation of western laws and western education as instances of epistemic violence during this period. Chapter 5 critically examines the occurrence of radical violence against tradition from 1960s to 1990s. Beginning with the rise of student missionarism and messianism, it looks at the rise of violence as a means of perpetuating state messianism by suppressing dissent. It argues that epistemic and physical violence produced native colonialism in Ethiopia.

Chapter 6 then looks at the effect of the western education system on the lives of Ethiopian students today. It shows that Ethiopian students experience a deep sense of double alienation, from tradition and from the system of power, Elitdom. The chapter demonstrates that centerlessness is the outcome of double alienation and violence against tradition,

which contributes to the perpetuation of native colonialism. Finally, in the Conclusion, I draw theoretical lessons on the nature of education and present methodological insights for relevant education as well. Although the sources of my analysis for this book is heavily drawn from the Ethiopian Orthodox *Tewahido* tradition, I acknowledge the existence of other traditions such as the Gada system of the Oromo and the Muslim tradition as equally important sources of knowledge that need to be studied in order to make education relevant to the people in Ethiopia.

CHAPTER 1

Colonialism Without Colonization

Colonialism is first of all a matter of consciousness and needs to be defeated ultimately in the minds of men (Nandy, 1983, p. 63).

In Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's acclaimed novel, *Devil on the Cross*, protagonist Jucinta Wariinga dreamed about the crucifixion of the devil. The Devil had robes that disguised its cunning nature of doing good in plain sight and evil in disguise. One day, the poor people in Africa crucified him on the cross and left him to die. After three days, men who wore suits and ties raised him up from the cross and begged him to give them a slice of his robes of cunning. When the Devil gave them what they wanted, they inherited all the evils of the world and started to snigger at the poor (1982, pp. 13-14). The story is a metaphor of the transfer of power from white administrators to African elites after the end of European colonization. The symbolism behind the robes of cunning also suggests that the mental effect of colonization is more powerful and enduring than its physical power. The continuation of a colonial type domination after the end of European colonial rule led to the rethinking of the relationship between Western and non-western countries. Some scholars emphasize the distinction between colonization and colonialism. Colonization is the creation of a physical empire at a definite time and space but colonialism is the creation of a metaphysical empire that transcends both (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). Others emphasize on a distinction between internal and external colonialism. While external colonialism is a partial or full loss of national sovereignty due to the domination of a

country by a foreign power, internal colonialism has many features that depend on power distributions across political, economic, racial, cultural and other factors within a country (Pinderhughes, 2011). It also explains the condition where the ruling elites of Southern countries colonize their own people using the same processes used by European colonizers in the past (Calvert, 2001).

The direct application of theory regarding internal colonization or colonialism to Ethiopia may create a dilemma due to the absence of a history of European colonization that resulted in a legacy of colonial culture and institutions being inherited to the current ruling elite in the country. However, despite the absence of such a colonial legacy, the Ethiopian state has imitated foreign ideas and created internal processes that resemble colonialism. Therefore, the term colonialism is important to show the epistemic and structural dependence of the state on foreign powers. Unlike in other countries where colonial violence is well known from the history of colonial rule under Europeans, in Ethiopia colonial violence is hidden in the history of independence that is used by elites to mask their own imitated ideas and practices as initiatives inspired by “native” factors. I use the term *native colonialism* to explain the development of a colonial consciousness that alters traditional and historical processes through epistemic and physical violence in Ethiopia.

Epistemic Violence

The first and most distinguishing mark of colonialism is the creation of colonial consciousness (Nandy, 1983). Colonial consciousness is first created and maintained through violence on indigenous knowledge. As the seminal work of Edward Said showed, western knowledge invented the concept of the orient using languages, concepts, beliefs, values and emotions that are internal to its own, western tradition (1978). Yet, in this act of invention, although the tradition of the colonized people is muted, objectified and interpreted based on the knowledge of the colonizer, it also undergoes its own internal processes of constructing new meaning as it encounters the power of the colonizer. It is at this level that colonialism starts to set its roots deep into the culture of the colonized. It creates a way of educating, acculturating and domesticating the colonized. It

invents norms, rituals, hierarchies and new interests both from the colonizing and the colonized traditions, and brings them together to provide a new ideology that serves the colonial system. This process of colonizing minds and bodies takes place through two interrelated violences.

The first one is the epistemic violence that involves the deployment of knowledge which gives rise to a new vision of the world. Spivak defined epistemic violence as “the construction of a self-immolating colonial subject for the glorification of the social mission of the colonizer” (Spivak, 1999, p. 127). She also refers to it as “a set of human sciences busy establishing the ‘native’ as a self-consolidating other” (1999, p. 205). Epistemic violence involves reshaping the mind of the colonized to accept the worldview of the colonizer. It involves the reordering, reprioritizing, disregarding, and appropriating of local traditions. It produces knowledge that universalizes the ideology of the colonial system and particularizes the colonial people’s traditions. As Nandy observed, this process, “helps generalize the concept of the modern West from a geographical and temporal entity to a psychological category. The West is now everywhere, within the West and outside; in structures and in minds” (1983, p. 11).

The second major aspect of colonialism is the institutionalization of violence against dissent. As colonialism is not a system of consensus, its sustained dominance requires a mechanism for the deployment of force. To this end, it creates institutions, employs individuals and creates a system of reward and punishment, inclusion and exclusion, laws and procedures including the use of physical violence, based on the interest of those in power. It creates structural and economic dependency with dominant metropolitan powers and transfers raw materials and resources in exchange for manufactured goods, expertise and aid. While epistemic violence attempts to achieve a complete dominance of the colonial ideology, the institutionalization of violence addresses resistance against this domination. Both epistemic and physical violence produce a cultural praxis that perpetuates the colonial system. Then, “the violence insinuates itself into the economy, domestic life, language, consciousness”; it becomes omnipresent, ubiquitous and productive, making it “a spirit of violence” (Mbembe, 2001, p. 175). Even those who oppose the colonial system start to frame their resistance within the logic set by colonial consciousness.

Epistemic Location

The history of epistemic violence in Ethiopia masks the existence of multiple epistemic locations within the country. The period of Emperor Haile Selassie between 1960s and 1970s is a pivotal time in the rise of native colonialism not just due to the replacement of Haile Selassie by military leaders in 1974 but more importantly due to the high level of epistemic and physical violence that produced the dominance of western epistemology in the country. Literature on Ethiopian history, education, culture, and politics has been dominated by the views and actions of the students of that period. Many of the scholars who write about this time in Ethiopia's history focus on either the self-criticism or validation of the ideology and action of Ethiopian students during and after the fall of the monarchical system. Their choice of analytical social groups and theoretical and methodological frameworks are self-referential, as they center their analysis on western educated students which represent less than 1% of the population. Their works utilize western conceptions of modernization and progress rather than a deeper appreciation of the traditional knowledge and philosophy of the country. This has made it difficult for the current generation of Ethiopian students to question the dominance of western epistemology and historiography based on Ethiopian philosophy and traditions.

Despite this, there are notable scholars whose works contribute to a good understanding of the western education system. Among the various authors, the works of Teshome Wagaw (1990) and Randi Balsvik (1985) provide a good account of the development of higher education and the rise of modernist consciousness among the students. The historian Bahru Zewde's writings on Ethiopia's modern history provide a detailed account of the rise of western educated intellectuals as "pioneers of change" during the monarchical period and their tragic fate during the Derg (2002, 2010). Zewde's diagnosis of the Ethiopian Students' Movement attempts the impossible task of objectivity in his detailed historical account of one of the most controversial periods in the country's history. Another notable work is Messay Kebede's interpretation of the history of western education and the role of radical elites in the country (1999, 2008b). Kebede's appreciation of the importance of culture and the effect of cultural dislocation in modernization is a critical source of insight for my

own work. Kebede is exceptional in being unapologetically critical of his generation's infatuation with Marxism-Leninism and the consequence of radicalism due to their separation from tradition. Tekeste Negash is another notable critic of the Ethiopian education system who considered low quality and inefficiency as a sign of deep crisis in the country's education (1990, 2010). His provocative criticism of the structural failure and the "curse of English as a medium of instruction" provides an important critical voice to the field.

This book takes relevant information and lessons from the above and many other authors of the Ethiopian education system, but differs in its methodology and conclusion by putting the center of the analysis outside the western school system. In particular, it starts with an interpretation of Ethiopia's traditional self-conception and knowledge, and analyzes the rise of epistemic violence against tradition since the last decade of the 19th century. Thus, the fundamental departure in this work is the question of epistemic location: where does the researcher endeavor to stand while speaking about his/her topic? (Mignolo, 2003, p. 5). This question is pertinent in my study because most studies on Ethiopian education so far assumed a neutral, objective and universal position while their social group and epistemology were driven only from a single source (the West). It is therefore important to consider the notion of epistemic location vis-à-vis other types of locations such as social, economic and political. Epistemic location emanates from a shared worldview that directs the selection, organization and interpretation of meaning and reality from one's perspective. Failure to recognize the existence of multiple epistemic locations leads to the adoption of a God's viewpoint on all aspects of reality and the dismissal of epistemological, cognitive, spiritual and creative diversities (Santos, Nunes, & Meneses, 2007). Western knowledge serves as a dominant epistemic location for Ethiopian elites to present their ideas as universal, neutral and objective truths, simultaneously ignoring the fact that western knowledge is itself local (not universal) and promoting western epistemology as the only basis of knowledge. Moving the center of the analysis from the western epistemic location to Ethiopian epistemic sources provides significant difference in terms of how concepts such as tradition, education and the role of the elites are interpreted in Ethiopia's modern history.

This approach is not intended to draw comparison between Ethiopian traditions and the West as such comparison implies the conceptual

dependency of the former on the latter. The purpose of the book is to show *how* and *at what cost* western knowledge became hegemonic in Ethiopia. Before the rise of western knowledge as a source of scientific truth, political and social status was largely justified on the basis of traditional beliefs and practices. This does not mean that the country had pure and innocent traditions or political power always required traditional acceptance. There is no question that the traditional leaders were privileged and had significant power, but largely they did not have a different epistemic location from their people. The use of violence against their political rivals was often motivated by the desire to maintain economic and political dominance rather than an ideological or epistemic one. It is true that their ideology was driven largely from the indigenous *Tewahido* Christianity, but they were not always motivated by a puritan vision of converting the entire population to their own faith. Although exceptions exist, such as the attempt to forcefully convert Orthodox followers to Catholicism during Susneyos (1607-32) and the forceful conversion of the Wollo Muslims during Yohannis IV (1872-89), such incidents were either discontinued or suggest political motives more than epistemic ones. This conclusion is supported by the protection given to Islam by the Ethiopian emperors before it was established in Mecca and the social ties that developed between followers of the two religions. This does not suggest the existence of a just and non-violent epistemic order during the monarchical periods. Instead, it simply shows that the boundary between the rulers and the ruled is not demarcated purely on the basis of epistemic antagonism between the two. Within differentiated social locations there were plural worldviews that were not reduced into fixed and antagonistic binaries.

I argue that a distinct epistemic location emerged with the imitation of western ideas and institutions, especially the western education system since the late 19th Century in Ethiopia. This new development can be related to the rise of a western epistemic order, a global hierarchy in terms of knowledge, language and place that gives superiority to western knowledge, the English language and urban areas over non-western knowledges and rural communities (Grosfoguel, 2011). What is uniquely important about the western epistemic order is its expansion to the rest of the world through colonialism and imperialism, and its institutionalization through state structures and policies. In particular, the western

epistemic order colonized the production of knowledge, alienating students of poor countries from the identities and worldviews of their local communities. Although students may share the same social location of their local communities, this does not mean that they also share a similar epistemic location with them. Among Ethiopians trained in western knowledge and language, many adopted the epistemic location created by the western epistemic order. This process gave rise to epistemic violence that links the experience of Ethiopian students with other students in the non-western world.

The Narrative of Traditionalism and Globalism

In Ethiopia, the western epistemic location provides two narratives to justify modernization through the imitation of western knowledge and the leadership role of its students. These can be regarded as the narrative of traditionalism (not tradition) and globalism. The narrative of traditionalism portrays Ethiopian traditions as static artefacts in two important ways. The first portrayal provides traditions as innocent and genuine artefacts that should pass from one generation to another throughout the history of a nation. This romantic imagination is often produced using sources that are not part of the living tradition and practice of the people. For example, Ethiopia's glorious image is often produced based on Greek writers such as Homer, Herodotus and Diodorus, European historians who visited the country, or local scholars who selected specific historical events to glorify or denounce the present. The common misgiving of this approach is essentialism, a perspective that disconnects the historical record of the tradition from its living legacy among the people now. Instead of using the Ge'ez texts, oral stories, lived experiences and current practices as interconnected witnesses of local knowledge, many authors presented them as disconnected evidences that explain preformulated ideological or theoretical assumptions. The narrative of traditionalism in this approach is only partially related to the historical and current lives of the people.

The second portrayal of traditionalism presents traditions as primitive ways of life. This approach is the most common among Ethiopian intellectuals who justified the imitation of western education and the removal of the monarchical system through revolutionary violence.

This narrative proposes that the existence of a feudal and brutal political system ruling over a static and primitive traditional culture before 1974 necessitated the rise of radicalized ideas and measures to end it. The students were determined to liberate their people from the bondage of oppressive regimes and customs through a popular revolution. As the book will show, this self-centered analysis mimics foreign concepts to selectively interpret Ethiopia's past only in relation to its own rationalities. For instance, despite the fact that the social, economic and political realities in Ethiopia were different from medieval Europe, the term "feudalism" and "peasant societies" were imported to describe the monarchical history of the country (Cohen, 1974; Ellis, 1976). Here, I am not attempting to defend the monarchical system. My focus is to draw attention to the foreign epistemic sources that objectified local tradition and to clarify how I approach the difference between tradition and traditionalism.

The book makes an important distinction between the two. Jaroslav Pelikan suggested that "tradition is the living faith of the dead, traditionalism is the dead faith of the living" (1984, p. 65). I view tradition as a society's immediate source of meaning, like culture but with deeper roots in history. It grows in the experience of people, in their memories, in their historical records, daily practices, fears and aspirations. It is a context for the dialogue between past and present lives. Tradition gives historical sense, spiritual meaning, a worldview to interpret the present and the future. But, traditionalism is the imagination of the past from an epistemic location that objectifies tradition either as the romantic or barbaric past.

Based on traditionalism, Ethiopian elites imported epithets such as "feudal" and "peasantry" to decontextualize and freeze aspects of traditions either as resistant or complementary to their project of modernism. This process invented the past as a legitimate ground for the civilizing role of western educated intellectuals. It also pushed traditional leaders and institutions away from the present and into the remote past as irrelevant. The construction of the past as barbaric also extends to the entire history of the country. For example, Mammo portrays the image of perpetual warfare and barbarism of three thousand years only by selecting the 11 years of Zemene Mesafint, which was a civil war among the nobility to become king makers. He alleges:

From time immemorial to the present, the people of Ethiopia have always been at war among themselves, on the one hand, and against foreign aggressors, on the other. In the country's long history it is very difficult to find a single decade devoted to peace and civil economic activities. One historical account may illustrate this point clearly. In what is known as the Era of the Princes, (locally referred to as *Zemene mesafint*), the monarchy and the nobility were continuously engaged in civil wars (Mammo, 1999).

Mammo travels wildly to the vast field of Ethiopian history only to select troubled events and practices that would construct the writer's image of a barbaric past. A similar description of history goes: "Generally kings and emperors claimed to have been chosen by 'God' to rule, not by the people. The political culture of Ethiopia emanates largely from the hoary history of its culture of political violence" (Ayele, 2010, p. 219). Such descriptions contradict even the account of modern historians such as Zewde's observation that "although war was common it was often resorted to only after negotiation and mediation had failed" (2010, p. 432). It also shows the acceptance of western historiography as a universal and valid method of writing history. The Western method of writing history is associated with historicism which according to Foucault means "the link, the unavoidable connection, between war and history, and conversely, between history and war" (2004, p. 172). When they write history, most western historians excessively focus on war. They often create a connection among disconnected historical events across space and time using the theme of war, in order to present modernism as the higher stage of human civilization. This makes war and history synonymous. As Foucault argues, "war is waged throughout history, and through the history that tells the history of war" (2004, p. 173). This concern is clear from the way Ethiopian history has been, intentionally or unintentionally, narrated as a history of war by several western educated historians. According to Schaefer, the emphasis on incessant war in Ethiopia came from a counterfactual analysis by European travelers and diplomats who went to the country during the *Zemene Messafint* (2006). These Europeans were interested in warfare and skirmishes to write fascinating stories that fit the racial stereotypes of the 18th and 19th Century in Europe: "Cruelty elicited much commentary by most travellers for it complemented their thesis that

Ethiopians were barbarous” (2006, p. 350). For example, Samuel Gobat, a European traveler in Ethiopia during the Zemene Messafint, demonstrated how the evidence of war is often collected. Gobat asked Ethiopians about their practices of war presenting various leading questions such as whether prisoners of war would be mutilated or not, and tried to connect disconnected and exceptional incidents to prove the thesis of barbarism. Seeing the reaction and response of his respondents he wrote:

Though I have heard of some acts of cruelty, the Abyssinians cannot be regarded as a cruel people, especially in the interior of the country. Even during the ravages of war, they are rarely disposed to slay an enemy, when he can be taken prisoner; and when they see the scale of victory rising in their favour, they are far more inclined to spare their foes who are still defending themselves with resolution and bravery, than to wreak their vengeance in unmerciful butchery (1850, p. 463).

Gobat’s story corroborates with the tradition of reconciliation (*irq*) and the limit of violence. The depiction of Ethiopian history as the history of barbarism and warfare has little to do with the reality of war, but more with the motive and ideology of the authors. My argument here is not to support the opposite claim that Ethiopia’s history was peaceful. The past is rich enough to supply writers with the evidence to write it as the period of warfare or peace. Instead of the general conclusions of traditionalism, one has to focus on the epistemology that drives the interpretation of historical reality. My interest is to show how elite ideology selects similar events from the past to create a homogenous space that supports its claims. Traditionalism is often presented to make an ideological statement about the present. But as a historical construction, it hides certain “truths” about the present too.

Several scholars who wrote about the Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM) presented a violent and repressive traditional context as a cause for the necessity of radical change in Ethiopia. Without rejecting or condoning this claim, it is important to note how this claim casts the monarchical system as primitive and those who rally against it as progressive, regardless as to what they bring to replace it. It fits with the assumption that modern history is progressive despite the reality of the post 1974 period being a time when a large number of people have been brutalized,

starved, repressed, displaced, dispossessed, jailed and murdered in masses while secularized radical political forces were competing for power. If the cruelty of the monarchical system was the only cause of radicalism and violence, why did the students remain radical and violent to each other before and after the fall of the monarchy? The bitter antagonism among various political groups irrespective of power differences show that achieving epistemic dominance is the hidden goal of political struggle.

It is commonly held that the student-led revolution of 1974 failed because it was hijacked by the military. A close reading of the ideas and activities of the students show that the notion of a hijacked revolution is untenable. The revolution was never hijacked of its ideology or epistemology. As far as epistemic location is concerned, the difference between the military and the students was the answer to the question who had the gun to shoot first? Both the military and the students were trainees of Haile Selassie's elitist institutions. Both followed western epistemology and also believed in the cult of violence. The cult of violence was even first propagated by the students, not the military (M. Kebede, 2008a). If the students' resentment of Haile Selassie was the absence of a democratic space for reformation, it is instructive to look into the space they created for dialogue among different student political groups. As Zewde noted, the students were engaged in a verbal violence that led to physical violence later (2010). The students' rejection of the 1972 Education Sector Review, which aimed at Ethiopianizing the curriculum by changing the medium of instruction from English to the national language and by focusing on agriculture and vocational training, shows the distinction between the epistemic location of the students and their people (Paulos Milkias, 2006). It is true that Ethiopian students did more than chanting the "Land to the Tiller" slogan in support of the rural majority during the monarchical period. However, there is little intellectual resistance now against the "Land to Investors" program which results in the transfer of about several million hectares of land to foreign and local investors (Rahmato, 2011). Rahmato argues that the misery of rural people increases as the predatory hands of the state reaches to their villages (2009). This is not to argue that the revolutionary students were motivated by Ego-Politics of power; rather, I argue that they were motivated by an ideological vision created by the epistemic location they adopted in relation to the rest of the society. As Paulo Freire argued, even the most ardent

revolutionaries could become as dangerous as the oppressor so long as the revolution is conceptualized and directed by ideas that make the people ignorant (1970).

The narrative of globalism provides the existence of an international order that requires irresistible compliance at a local level. This narrative hides the western epistemic location and structural dependence of Ethiopian elites by presenting the global as a homogenous entity with superior and rational principles that necessitates the integration of local economies and traditions. This narrative uses globalization to justify the imitation of western curriculum and language in higher education. It also provides a justification for the power of western educated Ethiopians to act in the name of a higher goal. Globalism contributes to the high privilege and status given to intellectuals educated in western countries over those educated within Ethiopia. This is not to deny that the global context does not have compelling pressures that require local responses; however, I argue that it is the epistemic location of the leaders that determine the quality of the response to those pressures. It should be remembered that the Berlin Conference of 1888 and the entire period of colonialism was an irresistible international context that pressured the country to submit to European superiority. But, Ethiopian leaders of that time did not accept the global consensus over their destiny. To their credit, they saved the people from the violence of European colonization and left an uplifting psychological platform for a united action in the country. However, the acceptance of globalism means Ethiopian leaders are inclined to submit to globalization and serve as intermediaries between the local and the global.

Elitdom as Native Colonialism

The narrative of globalism and traditionalism provided above is not merely an example of elite ideology. It is a discourse produced and distributed by and through institutional power and resources. It results in epistemic violence by allowing the exclusion of indigenous knowledges from education, the devaluation of local identities, and the creation of new hierarchy, identity and interests. The narrative of globalism and traditionalism contributes to the colonial character of Elitdom as it dismisses the dynamism and relevance of existing local knowledges to political

and economic processes. In short, it creates a mechanism or a system for an elite privileged few to rule society. As provided in the forthcoming chapters, I argue that a new political system called Elitdom has been created in Ethiopia since 1974 through epistemic violence against tradition and the suppression of dissent. The term Elitdom is used to contextualize how power operates on the basis of one's relevance to institutions rather than society or culture. According to Hartmann, elitism suggested a dualistic view of society as a binary of elites and non-elites, or elites and the masses: "In this debate elite and mass represented two sides of the same coin: elite was the positive concept, mass the negative" (2004, p. 5). Shils argues that in most Asian and African states, elites were disposed to act on behalf of the population. They advocated for change, called for the "dethronement of the rich and the traditionally privileged from their positions of pre-eminent influence", and considered the diffusion of science to the masses as a means of changing society (1960, p. 266).

Elitism among western educated Ethiopians shares the above features at the epistemic or ideological level. But elite status emanates from attachment with the power of the state, not from excellence in local life. Because of this, elites continue to enjoy the privilege while disregarding, violating or even attacking traditional values and practices. This means, elitism is not just a privilege but also power, a license to dominate local worldviews or invalidate others' meanings. Unlike the older justification of power as a gift of the divine, the power of Elitdom is created through a process that produces the ignorance of the masses using ideas that are alien to local experiences. If one is able to use the term kingdom as a collective name to the country under the reigns of several kings before 1974, one can also use the term Elitdom to refer to the country under the rule of elite rulers since then. Like colonialism, Elitdom is a political system that dominates mental spaces and physical bodies, individuals and territories through institutionalized violence against tradition.



CHAPTER 2

Kebra Nagast

Place and Covenant in Traditional Thought

There is a book called 'Kebra Nagast' which contains the law of the whole of Ethiopia and the names of the shums (chiefs), and churches, and provinces are in the book. I pray you find out who has got this book, and send it to me, for in my country people will not obey my orders without it.
Yohannis IV, King of Zion, Emperor of Ethiopia

Introduction

Of all the books and artifacts which the British looted from Ethiopia, the loss of the Kebra Nagast caused particular anxiety for the authority of the Ethiopian empire. In 1872, Emperor Yohannis IV wrote a letter to the British government that contained the above sentences. The letter moved people in the British Museum who returned the book to the king in 1873 (Isaac 1971).

Modern Ethiopian scholars have hardly made any attempt to interpret the significance of the Kebra Nagast. Any reference to the book reduces it to the mythical ideology of divine rule. No doubt the monarchical system had used part of the story in the book to justify the rule of a Solomonic bloodline in the country. However, as this chapter shows, the Kebra Nagast is not a mere political statement. It embodies metaphysical, epistemological and axiological concepts that inform the lives of a significant number of the population. As we cherish Plato's *The Republic* without taking his belief in the Greek Gods seriously, we could also learn from the Kebra Nagast without accepting the divinity of past emperors.

The common narrative about the Kebra Nagast focuses on the story of the Queen of Sheba meeting King Solomon of Israel and the coming of the Ark of the Covenant. The Ethiopian Queen of Sheba heard the wisdom of King Solomon and travelled to Jerusalem to visit him. During her stay she was tricked into sleeping with King Solomon. On her way back to Ethiopia, she gave birth to a boy, Menelik I. Later, the young Menelik travelled to Israel to visit his father in Jerusalem. King Solomon rejoiced and wanted Menelik to succeed his throne in Israel after him. However, Menelik refused the offer out of his love for Ethiopia, and wanted to return home. Solomon then ordered the noble men of Israel to send their firstborn sons to serve Menelik in Ethiopia. The sons of the noble men abducted the Ark of the Covenant from the Temple of Solomon and brought it with them to Ethiopia. It is believed that the true Ark of the Covenant is still in the Axum church of Zion Maryam. From that time onwards, Ethiopia became the chosen nation of God, and Menelik I became the founder of the Solomonic dynasty in the country.

Several scholars believe that this story had significant influence in the formation of a national Ethiopian culture. Jones and Monroe noted that “belief in the legend has continued to flourish down to modern times” (1955, p. 20). They also emphasized that “the royal copy of the Kebra Nagast came to be regarded with superstitious reverence” (1955, p. 20). Buxton witnessed that it “became a national saga of the country, in which every citizen believed implicitly” (1970, p. 130). Sylvia Pankhurst’s observation suggested dual purposes of the Kebra Nagast (1955, p. 100). On the one hand, it aimed at consolidating the existing historical and religious beliefs in Ethiopia into a single authoritative text that anchored the destiny of the people. On the other hand, it established core ethical values that would guide the action of the King and his followers. Kebede considered that “the Kebra Nagast is a national epic” that anchored the unity of church and state, as well as the synthesis between the secular and the religious, as the best guarantee for “the survival of Christian Ethiopia in a hostile environment dominated by heathen and powerful Muslim countries” (2006, p. 7). Since it became the basis for a “nationalist ideology,” it served to establish the source, legitimacy and validity of state power in Ethiopia (M. Kebede, 2008b, pp. 168-169).

Donald Levine argued that the Kebra Nagast was an established source of national identity. It was “the foundation of the nation of

Ethiopia with particular significance and destiny” and the means of “defending the worth of the national identity” (Levine, 1974). According to Levine:

Its appeal transcends the claims of any parochial loyalties in Ethiopia. It glorifies no tribe, no religion, no linguistic group, but the Ethiopian nation under her monarch. It declares this nation superior to all others... provides a mandate for the Ethiopian kingdom to expand its dominion in the name of the Lord of Hosts (1974, p. 107).

Jones and Monroe identified three possible reasons for the motive behind the writing of the book. The first was the desire of Ethiopians to claim their ancient existence. They argue that “Parvenu peoples, like parvenu individuals, hanker after ancestors, and peoples have as little scruple in forging family trees as have individuals” (1955, p. 16) . Like the Romans who crafted themselves as the cultural successors of ancient Greece when confronted with its legacy, the Ethiopians invented the Kebra Nagast to claim an ancient, divine heritage at a time when they came into contact with the Christian East.

Secondly, Jones and Monroe argue that the book was written so that Ethiopians could claim for themselves the alluring promise that God made to Israelites. Just like the Saxon’s claimed heredity from Isaac to create a mythical link between the British Empire and the promised land, Ethiopians “moved by the same desire, concocted a legend which is at any rate more plausible than the theories of the British Israelites” (1955, p. 17). The third reason behind the book’s creation was “the desire of the royal house of Abyssinia to assert their divine right to the throne” (1955, p. 18). Russell made similar remarks regarding the book (1833). He accepted the internalization of the Kebra Nagast by the people but rejected the truthfulness of its story.

It [the Kebra Nagast] is regarded indeed by the natives as a faithful repository of their ancient history; though the slightest attention to it will convince the reader that it is the production of an ignorant monk, who used the Septuagint translation of the Bible as the groundwork of a ridiculous fable, with the sole view of ministering to the vanity of his countrymen (1833, p. 91).

What is commonly recognized among these authors is that the book served as an instrument of self-definition for Ethiopians in relation to the world. As witnessed by Ullendorff, the Kebra Nagast “is the repository of Ethiopian national and religious feelings, perhaps the truest and most genuine expression of Abyssinian Christianity” (1965, p. 144). However, two important remarks should be made on how the story of the Kebra Nagast is presented above. First, there is controversy over the historicity of the facts in the book (Munro-Hay, 2001). Secondly, the Kebra Nagast was evaluated from the perspective of western scholars who focused on the state and its use of religious ideology more than on the cultural lives and philosophical perspectives of the people. This disproportionate focus, mainly due to the academic preoccupation of the authors, gave little insight into the social and spiritual meanings the people attached to the text.

Jones and Monroe’s consideration of the book as a mere concocted legend sheds little light on the reason why, as they rightly indicated, the “Kebra Nagast came to be regarded with a superstitious reverence” (1955, p. 20). Jones and Monroe simply considered the text in terms of how Ethiopian monarchs used it to define the country as a nation in order to protect themselves from the foreshadowing threats of the Judaic religion and the Byzantine Empire (Levine, 1974, p. 104). In addition, as argued by Crummey, “class and cultural prejudices are rampant throughout [Jones and Monroe’s] book manifesting themselves in a rich variety of pejorative adjectives” (1979). While considering the importance of the book to the formation of indigenous national identity in Ethiopia, my interpretation of the text focuses on the values that sustained social and political relationships among the people. For this reason, the academic controversies surrounding the origin of the book or the truthfulness of the story of Queen of Sheba and the Ark of the Covenant are not considered relevant here. What is considered important is the significance of the book in framing social consciousness and organizing political life in Ethiopia. In this regard, I concur with Wagaw’s position that:

Whether this tale [the story in the book of the Kebra Nagast] has some factual basis or not is a moot question; what is important is that the work was believed by the leaders and the led alike, and provided some guidance and served as the foundation for legitimizing the beliefs and actions of state, monarchy, and church until recent times (1990, p. 50).

Whether the reader believes the story of the coming of the Ark of the Covenant (*tabot*) to Ethiopia or not, the *tabot* has been the center of social and spiritual life for several centuries. Its presence and significance has been settled through more than two thousand years of religious and cultural practice. If the Ark of the Covenant was a legend designed only for political legitimacy, as some authors claim, it would have been discarded with the fall of the Monarchial system in 1974. On the contrary, the *tabot* has been deeply rooted in the social lives of the population. It has been replicated and placed at the center of every Orthodox *Tewahido* church throughout the country. Individually and as a group, members of the community draw meaning and identity from the *tabot*. The Kebra Nagast is one of the most important textual sources that contain insights into the meanings attached to the significance of the *tabot*. As will be shown, its most important suggestion is the establishment of Ethiopia as a special place in the world: The land is believed to have gained divine destiny, giving the King and the people a pious purpose in the world.

Place and Covenant

Ethiopia is often referred to as a covenant land (የቃልኪዳንነት). Although in modern times, this concept has been decontextualized and often associated with Orthodox *Tewahido* spirituality, it contains important philosophical concepts that show the significance of place (land) and covenant in Ethiopia's traditional thought. The notion of a covenant land provided a sense of belonging to a sacred place. This imagining has various internal and external sources. For example, the Black Diaspora since slavery referred to biblical and Greek sources to advocate for the existence of Ethiopia as a sacred place that would restore the pride of black people in the world. An example of such sources could be Juan Latino's poem that reflects on the racial pride this imagining created among the black communities in North and South America during slavery:

Aurora birthed him— like the blessed kings of Arabia she dedicated to
God as first fruits of the pagans.
And if my black face displeases your ministers, o King, a white one is not
pleasing to the people of Ethiopia.

There, the white man visiting Aurora is the sullied one.
Officials are black, and the king there too is dark (qtd. in Seo, 2011, p. 269).

Similarly, the imagining of Ethiopia as the place of deliverance from Babylon (the West) ignited the Back to Africa movement, the movement of Ethiopianism, which was the precursor of Pan-Africanism, and Rastafarianism. These movements looked to Ethiopia as a source of spiritual meaning and a place to *be*. Marcus Garvey declared, "We Negroes believe in the God of Ethiopia, the Everlasting God...we shall worship him through the spectacles of Ethiopia" (qtd. in Nelson, 1997, p. 69). However, the inaccessibility of local Ethiopian sources of knowledge due to linguistic, epistemological and historical barriers limited these imaginings only to western and secondary sources, creating a significant disconnect between the Ethiopian sense of place and the diasporic.

Insights into the Ethiopian notion of place and covenant can be drawn from the interpretation of the Ark of the Covenant, as contained in the Kebra Nagast and practiced in daily life. The Kebra Nagast presents the Ark of the Covenant as a physical *entity* and a *word* that expresses eternal will or agreement or law. As a physical entity, the Ark of the Covenant is presented as a holy seat, or a place that inhabits the glory of God: "It was made by the mind of God and not by the hand of the artificer, man, but He Himself created it for the habitation of His glory" (Kebra Nagast, 1932, p. 12). This physical entity or place is not without content. The Kebra Nagast describes the visible and invisible qualities *within* it, such as the diversity of colors, and the existence of objects that resemble marvelous stones. It adds,

It is a spiritual thing, it is full of compassion; it is a heavenly thing and is full of light; it is a thing of freedom and a habitation of the Godhead, Whose habitation is in heaven, and Whose place of movement is on earth, and it dwelleth with men and with the angels, a city of salvation of men, and for the Holy Spirit a habitation (Kebra Nagast, 1932, p. 12).

Here the Ark of the Covenant appears as a microcosm of the good things in the world. It is filled with precious stones which look like jasper and topaz; it is a place full of compassion and freedom. The imagining of place with such intrinsic substances suggests a perspective on the relationship

between the corporeal and the incorporeal, place and time, or the physical and the spiritual. It signifies the possibility of complex, infinite, and indeterminate webs of relationships, which form multiple realities inhabiting *place*.

Another important point is the imagining of place as *origin*. The Kebra Nagast presents the Ark of the Covenant as the Original Place, the first to be created:

Behold now, we understand clearly that before every created thing, even the angels, and before the heavens and the earth, and before the pillars of heaven, and the abysses of the sea, He created the Tabernacle of the Covenant, and this which is in heaven goeth about upon the earth (Kebra Nagast, 1932, p. 7).

Unlike the first verse of the Book of Genesis in the Bible which declares, “in the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth,” the Kebra Nagast declares that God first created the Tabernacle of the Covenant for his own habitation. The view of the Ark of the Covenant as the original place, the seat of God and his qualities of mercy, compassion and freedom resonates with the philosophical perspectives that give primary importance for place. For example, based on the analysis of western and non-western sources, Edward Casey held that the idea of place is inseparable from creation because creation must take place somewhere, saying, “if it is true that in the beginning was the Word, it is also true that in the beginning was the place” (1993, p. 18). From this perspective, place is the only origin and constant. The Hebrew word *Makom*, which means Place, used to refer to God. God, by his ability to carry the world, is a place for the world. In Ethiopia, the equivalent name for God is *Egzia’biher* which means Lord of country or place. The Ark of the Covenant is believed to be that place where God chose to emplace himself in order to give his law and mercy to the world. This notion of place challenges the anthropocentric view of reality by giving place its own metaphysical significance. Place becomes the seat of God, and God becomes the seat of place. Imbued with sanctity, meaning and purpose, place becomes not a *tabula rasa* or an object of human desire, but the source of principles, values, identities and meanings.

The second important aspect of the Ark of the Covenant is the notion of Covenant, the *word* that expresses the divine will. Covenant

(ቃልኪዳን) expresses consent and unbreakable promise. The Kebra Nagast emphasizes consent or the will of God (ፈቃደኣግዚአብሔር) as the basis for the creation of place:

For the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit¹ with good fellowship and right good will and cordial agreement together made Heavenly Zion to be the place of habitation of their Glory... and with ready agreement and good will They were all of this opinion ... and this common agreement and Covenant was [fulfilled] in Zion, the City of their Glory (Kebra Nagast, 1932, p. 1).

Here, the idea of consent introduces an important relationship between thought and action, or will and performance. It suggests a mode of reality that presents consent or “cordial agreement” as the basis of the act of creating. During *Kidassie* (mass), the priest recognizes this in his prayer, saying “who by word of Thy covenant hast created all things, for in him Thou art well pleased” (Rodwell, 1864, p. 28).

Covenant as a divine promise (ቃልኪዳን) suggests the notion of being *chosen* in the imagining of place. The Ark of the Covenant gave a sanctifying power to the land rather than the people. The people are regarded blessed for being in the land and for receiving its blessings. The Kebra Nagast provides:

The chosen ones of the lord are the people of Ethiopia. For there is the habitation of God, the heavenly Zion, the Tabernacle of His Law and the Tabernacle of His Covenant, which He hath made into a mercy-seat through [His] mercy for the children of men; for the rains and the waters from the sky, for the planted things... and the fruits, for the peoples and the countries, for the kings and nobles, for men and beasts, for birds and creeping things (Kebra Nagast, 1932, p. 144).

The promise of being chosen, which should be interpreted in relation to wisdom as humility, does not provide a superior quality to the people.

1. Although the Trinity is commonly regarded as a New Testament (Christian) concept, the Kebra Nagast introduces the concept of Trinity in the Old Testament, making the Father, The Son, and the Holy Ghost parties for the creation of Covenant.

There is no notion of a chosen people but a chosen place. The story of how the Ark of the Covenant moved from Israel to Ethiopia due to the “sin of the people” shows that the attributes of place flow into human beings as long as they keep the sanctity of place. The Ark of the Covenant was first given to Israelites through Moses. It was seated in “the land of inheritance, which is Jerusalem, the City of Zion” (Kebra Nagast, 1932, pp. 12-17). Seated at the city of Jerusalem, in the great temple made by King Solomon, the Ark became the promise of Israel’s messianic destiny, and its mark of being the chosen place of God. However, according to the Kebra Nagast, God’s will changed in favor of Ethiopia and allowed the son of the high priest of Israel, together with the male firstborns of the noblemen of Israel, to move the Ark of the Covenant to Ethiopia. The people of Israel cried for several days and told their King, “Zion has taken up her abode with thy firstborn and she shall be the salvation of the people of Ethiopia forever” (Kebra Nagast, 1932).

The coming of the Ark of the Covenant marked the elevation of the land of Ethiopia to the favor of God. The Ethiopian Queen accepted the Ark of the Covenant, outlawed pagan beliefs, and installed the Ten Commandments as the law of the nation. On the other hand, Solomon, the King of Israel worshipped the idols of Egypt. Moreover, in the New Testament, God foresaw that unlike Ethiopians, Israelites would reject Jesus without whom they would cease to become the chosen people of God. Due to this, Ethiopia became *The Second Israel* – the *place* of habitation for the sacred Ark of the Covenant. The great Ethiopian composer of the 6th Century Yared, referred to the country as “ጽዮን ሐዳስ ገረአምላክን” “The new Zion, the land of our Lord” (Keleb, p. 126). Similarly, in the Hagiographic book of King Lalibela, God was quoted to have told the king: “ወአንትሙሂፍቁራንዮሀዝብዘምከሀዘትሰመዩእስራኤልሐዲሳን,” which means “you [Ethiopians] are called the new Israelites, the people I love and am proud of” (Gedle Lalibela, 2001, p. 10).

The meaning of Covenant as a promise given to the people establishes a sacred relationship between human beings and the imagining of place provided above. As a spiritual teacher in Lalibela suggested, it links the spiritual and the physical worlds:

The Ark of the Covenant is the testament of God’s existence among us.
His very transcendental existence gained a concrete form and expression

through the Tabernacle of the Covenant. God created it to occupy a place, to dwell among us. He embodied himself in this Covenant and brought his own presence and his gifts of wisdom, protection and forgiveness near to human experience. The Tabernacle of the Covenant became the holy seat of His glory and the sign and the seal for His presence in our land as the center of the earth (Interview, 24 April, 2011).

The translation of the notion of a covenant land into social and political life could be established from three interrelated practices. These include the notion of the ideal king rule, the notion of the messianic destiny of Ethiopia, and the notion of center.

The Notion of the Ideal King Rule

Ethiopia is sometimes regarded as *hegere nigusse*, the land of the king. Although the practice of the kings may be inconsistent with the theory, the king is imagined as a representative of the divine authority and the virtuous characteristics of God on earth. This is illustrated in the coronation ceremony of a new king:

The ceremony of inaugurating a new emperor was purely religious and liturgical. It opens with the reading of Psalm 122. Then the Patriarch, in the presence of leading ecclesiastics, places the crown upon the monarch, seated on a throne, and says: "May God grant that this crown be a halo of holiness and glory. May you be pure in heart even as this gold is pure." To this blessing, the emperor replies, "Amen."...The emperor is given a sword known as the "Sword of Solomon," with the exhortation: "By this sword execute true justice, protect the Church, the widows, and the orphans, restore that which needs to be restored, chastise the wicked, render honour to the righteous; and with it serve our saviour Jesus Christ" (Ephraim Isaac, 2013a, p. 137).

As noted above, Covenant underscored the importance of consent, the deliverance of God's laws and mercy to his subjects. The King participates in divine authority by keeping the ethical standards attached to his power. As God has given his people law and mercy through the Covenant, so was the king expected to administer the people based on justice and compassion. To carry out his function, the ideal king was expected

to display his life at the intersection of vertical and horizontal virtues. Vertically, he was expected to remain connected with the power and the promise that the Covenant symbolized. Horizontally, he was expected to pursue and maintain wisdom in his relationship with his subjects. This implies that the “divine power” of the king was not synonymous with unlimited power. The exercise of power was subjected to predictable ethical principles without which the king would be regarded as a tyrant and evil.

The Kebra Nagast underscores virtue as a condition of the King’s power by presenting the main figures of the ancient world in the Bible as Kings who set exemplary leadership for succeeding kings. The book presented two types of Kings. The first were those who did not transgress the commandment of God. Such kings were considered wise, gracious, and pure in body and soul. Consequently, they defeated their enemies, rendered justice for their subjects, passed their kingdom to their succeeding generations, and died in honor (Kebra Nagast, 1932, p. 10). Those rulers who transgressed the commandment of God were cursed, lost their legitimacy to rule, and their children became “leprous and scabby,” and suffered various consequences. The message behind the text was intended to show that the King was anointed to rule in the likeness of God. The source of his authority was God (Sumner, 1981, p. 39), and he was responsible to rule in accordance with the laws and values of Covenant for he was regarded king only through God. This, at least in popular belief, subjected the power of the king to the traditional rules that were considered sacred.

The Notion of the Messianic Destiny of Ethiopia

This subsection will consider the basis of the belief in the messianic destiny of Ethiopia to show its ideological contribution to the independence of the nation as the only African state that successfully defended its freedom from European colonial administration. As shown above, the belief in the coming of the Ark of the Covenant to Ethiopia created the notion of a covenant land. The main idea behind this belief was articulated by a traditional education scholar whom I met in Lalibela:

The conception of Ethiopia’s messianic destiny could be contrasted with the apocalyptic destiny of the world. While other nations in the world

may wallow in despair and confusion, we believe that Ethiopia will remain forever because she holds in its soil the Ark of the Covenant, which is the most powerful assurance of God's protection till the end of the world (Interview, 14 April, 2011).

The view of the external world as dangerous, cruel and destined to an apocalyptic end is part of the classic view of eschatology which Ethiopia developed based on Christian Millenarianism (M. Kebede, 2008b, p. 118). Frost considered eschatological thought as "a form of expectation which is characterized by finality" (1952, p. 70). The most important element in eschatology is the endlessness of the end. It is the view of a time process devoid of unfolding events; a time "beyond which the faithful never peers" (1952, p. 70). What is emphasized in Millenarianism is "the ultimate transformation of the world in a sense that no further improvement could be made" (Hamilton, 2001, p. 12). Hence, Millenarianism is characterized by an eschatological view of time: the conception of salvation characterized by absolute finality and total redemption from the evil in the world.

Marxists interpreted this Millenarian belief as an expression of the resistance of the oppressed peoples of various cultures against the oppressive rule of the Roman Empire (Hamilton, 2001, p. 16). What has called upon the belief of these people in Millenarian salvation was their total and seemingly unending depredation under the power of an enemy against which they had little hope to revolt and win by their own means (Hamilton, 2001, p. 16). Thus, absolute salvation is a conception that is believed to follow its absence; it comes in the aftermath of absolute domination. However, until salvation is unfolded on a plane of eschatology, the world remains in the infernal circuit of opposing forces: good and evil, life and death, slavery and freedom, poverty and riches. Change in this context is simply an exchange between opposite categories.

Kebede articulated this change in terms of reversal, "what appears as new is actually nothing more than how opposites alternate" (M. Kebede, 2008b, p. 117). You may be rich but it is nothing because you will undoubtedly become poor one day, you may be healthy but you will fall sick, you may be happy but you will undoubtedly be sad, and you may be alive but you will die. It is the nature of the world, the condition of fate (*yedil guday*) for every earthly life to end up in apocalypse. It is within the context of this depressing view of life that the Ark of the Covenant

becomes a significantly important asset for the protection of Ethiopia. Kebede argues that

The belief that things are caught in a macabre movement of rotation highlights the unique role of the Kibra Nagast with its promise of an exceptional destiny to Ethiopia. The myth protects Ethiopia from the law of alteration in that it guarantees the final victory of Christian Ethiopia over all its enemies (M. Kebede, 2008b, p. 118).

Kebede's emphasis on the fall of time and everything within it under the apocalyptic fate of the macabre cycle is useful to illustrate the mentality of Ethiopian elites who enacted Marxist Leninism to act in the eschatological image/analogy of God. Nevertheless, it is also important to examine to what extent this interpretation leaves room to the rich imagining of the undetermined middle spaces that exist between and within these seemingly antagonistic and essentialist categories in the Ethiopian tradition. The conception of predetermined and irreversible qualities between good and evil may reflect the mentality of radicalized elites during the 1960s and 70s but not necessarily a messianic belief in the Ethiopian traditional thought. The Ethiopian tradition provides various rituals for individuals to move in contradictory, alternating, compromising, opposite and overlapping spaces. God may not be called upon to change the macabre nature of the world, but he could certainly be asked to grant protection, strength or willpower to society or the individual in the face of ongoing alterations. Angels, holy persons, magicians, priests and elders mediate the individual from various spaces that are not neatly demarcated from one another. The individual or society at large should observe certain rituals such as prayers, sacrifices, confessions, fastings, feeding the hungry in the name of holy persons, observing holydays, rendering justice and so on in order to avoid disastrous consequences (*meqisefit*) or to gain certain blessings and outcomes (Interview, 20 April, 2011). Within these practices, we find the rich legacy of traditional knowledges, rituals and myths that could become rich sources of insight. Therefore, myths and the observance of certain rituals could be considered as attempts to invite the Divine to intervene on one's behalf.

Myth in its earliest conception was considered as a form of speculative thought that asserts a certain truth beyond the foreseeable realm

of human experience (Frost, 1952, p. 70). It can be translated into various types of rituals that allow human beings to perform their part in the smooth running of the cycle of life. Although that cycle is destined to an apocalyptic end as the Christian belief in the end days of the world suggests, human beings nevertheless have a fundamental role to play to "lubricate its motion" (1952, p. 71). Hence, whether one believes the true faith or not, whether he/she prays or not, gives alms to the poor or not, sins or not plays an important role in the movement of alternates. In the Kebra Nagast, there are reasons provided as to why Ham was cursed, why Adam had fallen, and why the Kingdom of Israel and Rome lost the favor of God. Lamenting on the departure of the Ark of the Covenant to Ethiopia, Solomon blamed the role Israelites played to their own disgrace as: "Of our own free will we have polluted our life. He made us very wise, and of our own free will we have made ourselves more foolish than the beasts" (Kebra Nagast, 1932, p. 80).

Similarly, Hubbard refers to the Samaritan and Jewish traditions which describe the disappearance of the Ark due to the sin of the people and its future return "when God pleases" (1956, pp. 326-327). For Ethiopians, the Kebra Nagast was regarded as a messianic truth that enabled their kings to act in order to keep the promise that they were given by God. The possession of the Ark of the Covenant by Ethiopia, and the learning and practicing of wisdom by the King and his people, was considered significantly important to keep the good favor of God to act on behalf of the nation and its people. In this situation, although death and the apocalyptic end of the earth are unavoidable, they can nevertheless be delayed for a long time. The macabre cycle stops only with the end of the world, and the dawning of heaven with absolute finality.

Here one should take caution on how the notion of the chosen people could be regarded as threatening to the equality of the nations and of the cultures within the nation. In fact, some countries had applied it to emphasize God's role in politics, and to justify sufferings, losses and atrocities in the name of a higher destiny. In Germany, the protestant belief in the Covenant between God and the German nation was used to justify "the annihilation of those labelled by the Nazis not fit to be proper or healthy members of the German nation" (Lehmann, 1991, p. 270). Similarly, early Afrikaners believed that the Boers were a chosen people who shared an identity inherited from the Old Testament type Calvinism with

“a mandate to smite the heathen” (Du Toit, 1983; Moodie, 1980, p. 3). In Ethiopia too, it is impossible to rule out the contribution of the belief in a covenant land to the expansion of the empire to the southern parts of the country (Levine, 1974). There are stories of forceful conversions of the Wollo Muslims into Christianity during the Reign of Yohannis IV, and instances of severe repression of southern resistances against the supremacy of the central imperial state. However, it is important to consider that the conception of covenant was primarily related to the land rather than the people. Covenant was presented as a practice of wisdom – interpreted in the Kebra Nagast as humility, compassion and justice – rather than a license for the free exercise of brute force. Due to the role that it played to maintain diverse ethnic groups within a larger empire, the Ethiopian claim for messianic destiny was significantly different from the German and Boer claims of being the chosen people. It didn’t actually involve the destruction or death of those who were different in tradition or race, but rather the bringing of a common religion and sense of a singular nation. A good example is to see how Islam had been treated by the official Christian Ethiopian Empire.

With the exception of the 14 years of the *jihad* war of Ahmad Gran to destroy the Solomonic Empire (1529–1543), and the forceful attempt to convert the Wollo Muslims to Christianity by Yohannis IV, the social relationship between followers of Orthodox Christianity and Islam in Ethiopia could generally be considered as peaceful and tolerant (Abbink, 1998). Long before his followers were accepted as refugees in Axum, the Prophet Muhammad was said to have spoken of Ethiopia as “a country where no one is wronged, a land of righteousness” (R. Pankhurst, 1993, p. 21). When his followers were prosecuted, the Prophet Muhammad advised them to flee to Christian Ethiopia because “it is a land of righteousness where God will give you relief from what you are suffering” (qtd. in Tringham, 1965, p. 44). The *Adulis inscription* which was written in Greek in 150 A.D in Ethiopia confirms that territorial expansion was based on the restoration of local leaders to power subject to the payment of tribute to the central state (Tamrat, 1993, p. 40). The devout Christian King Amda Zeyon, whose name could be translated as the pillar of Zion, was reported to have said, “I am the emperor of all the Muslims in the land of Ethiopia” (1993, p. 41). Kaplan noted that, the conversion of the ethnic minorities to Christianity emphasized “continuity rather than dramatic change”:

Converts were expected to accept a new religion which was more powerful than their previous faiths but didn't claim to differ from them in essence. No attempt was made to change their political system or reform their social customs. Neither did Christianity represent a foreign culture or bring with it disruptive changes (1984, p. 124).

Traditional scholars believe that the wisdom of the Kings to spare rather than to destroy, to include rather than to isolate non-orthodox believers in their empire enabled the people of Ethiopia to develop tolerant views towards Islam (Interview, 20 March, 2011). Still today, there is a considerable cultural practice that unites more than divides Christian and Muslim believers in the country. Followers of both religions practice burial ceremonies, wedding ceremonies, *equb* (traditional saving) and cooperate in social and cultural life together. Despite the existence of tolerance and cooperative spirit in social life among the population, it should be admitted that Ethiopian rulers treated Islam as an inferior religion to Orthodox Christianity (Abbink, 1998).

Another contribution of the Kebra Nagast is its significant role to mobilize Ethiopians to form a sacred covenant or agreement for the defense of their nation. The feeling of Ethiopianism was expressed in culture such as poetry, music, dance and so on. Ethiopia has been surrounded by powerful Muslim rivals and European Christian colonialists for centuries. Since the rise of Mehemet Ali in 1805, Ethiopia had to battle against Egyptian expansionist interests who sought to control the source of the Blue Nile. This was significantly important especially with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 where Khedive Ismail of Egypt tried to invade Ethiopia with the support of American and European officers, and was defeated at the battle of Gundet and Gura in 1875 and 1876, respectively.

The belief in the covenant land was effective not only against Muslim invaders but also against Christian colonizers. Ethiopia had been defiant of the European scramble for Africa. European "cosmopolitan adventurers who tried to trick the natives ...found themselves tricked" (Waugh & Hamilton, 2007, p. 34). The King of Ethiopia "was no savage chief to whom any white face was a divine or a diabolic portent" (2007, p. 19). The psychological uplifting that the Kebra Nagast promoted was so immense that the Ethiopians never looked upon other nations as superior to theirs. This attitude was contemptuous to European superiority.

The essence of the offence [committed by Abyssinians] was that the Abyssinians, in spite of being by any possible standard an inferior race, persisted in behaving as superiors; it was not that they were hostile [to Europeans], but contemptuous. The white man, accustomed to other parts of Africa, was disgusted to find the first-class carriages on the railway usurped by local dignitaries; he found himself subjected to official and villainous-looking men at arms whose language he did not know, who showed him not the smallest reluctance to using force on him if he became truculent (Waugh & Hamilton, 2007, p. 35).

In 1896, the declaration of war against Italian colonial expedition called the entire population to fight for the sake of place, family and faith. The *tabot* (the replica of the Ark of the Covenant) was carried to the war front with the army. The victory of Ethiopia over Rome (Italy) was prophesized and believed based on the status of the Ethiopian church and King against the Roman church and leader. In the Kebra Nagast, although the Roman Empire was recognized as a counterpart of the Ethiopian Empire, it is presented as disgraced for accepting the false teachings of Nistros, making only Ethiopia the bearer of the true belief in Christ. Therefore, before the battle had begun, the war was considered as a battle between the holy empire of Ethiopia and the fallen empire of Rome. The following prophetic poem (*Qine*), translated into English by Sylvia Pankhurst, was sung in Addis Ababa for Menelik as victorious and “a saviour of the world”:

Gomorra and Sodom, lands of retribution, shall find pardon on the terrible day of battle. But you, base city of Rome,
That has come up on you which did not come upon Sodom;
For Menelik, saviour of the world,
Has sent you swathed in blood to visit Dathan and Abiram in the grave;
And he will not leave even one of your seed to bear your name;
for remembering the counsel of Samuel of old,
And knowing that the punishment of Saul was due to his disobedience in sparing Agag;
He has sworn that the sword in his hand shall exterminate every grain of your seed (qtd. in 1955, p. 258).

The above poem shows that the victory of Ethiopia over Italy was certainly believed and was even celebrated before the war took place at Adwa.

The Notion of Center

The relationship between the Ark of the Covenant and the notion of center as a special location in *place* is important. Center represents a place within a place, a location of prime significance, a source of moral power and ideals. The Jewish legend holds that “the construction of the earth was begun at the center” (Ginzberg, 1913, p. 38). As indicated in the Bible, 1 King 6:19, the Ark of the Covenant was placed at the center of Solomon’s Temple.

A traditional education scholar from Lalibela outlined that during the Old Testament, due to the existence of the Ark of the Covenant at the Temple of Solomon, Jerusalem had been imagined as *maekele midir* which means the “center of the earth” (Interview, 10 April, 2011). However, the center moved with the Ark of the Covenant to Ethiopia. In this regard, it is believed that the building of the monolithic churches of Lalibela was intended to “reproduce” the new holy land in Ethiopia (Kaplan, 1984, p. 20).

In the Ethiopian *Tewahido* church, which is the social center of life in most rural villages in Ethiopia, the replica of the Ark of the Covenant (*tabot*) is placed at the center, in the Sanctum Sanctorum (Holy of Holies). Center is considered as fullness, and was used to portray the faces of angels and saints to represent the fullness of grace bestowed upon them by the divine (Interview, 12 April, 2011). A circular position is also used to maintain the fullness of participants in a meeting or in sharing a meal. Most traditional houses are built in a circular shape. At home, at the center of every center lies the head of the family, or the leader who is accessible to and connected with everyone who belongs to the group.

The concept of center underscores the notion of belonging. It is important as a way of showing the need to be rooted in a place, or in a cultural context and to be connected with the origin in order to draw purpose from it and reach out to the world to nourish the source (Interview, 28 March, 2011). The individual exists as a web of relationships that make him or her a parent, a relative, a resident within the domain of a particular *tabot* or *debir* (place). Center connects the individual with place and values that anchor his/her existence. Bearing a name that has some sort of significant meaning to the family or the community, and observing traditional practices that are commonly accepted, the individual lives within a

moral universe where social worth is more important than economic interests. Thus, the notion of center is important in political and social life as it instills a sense of belonging and identity that creates families, communities, cultures and regions as interconnected parts of a place. Due to the belief in the presence of the Ark of the Covenant, Ethiopia is imagined as the center of the world whose interest and values cannot be suppressed by the interest and values of other nations or entities.

This notion of center can be related to the idea of origin, the idea that Ethiopians were among the earliest peoples on the earth. In his important book, *ጥቢ፡አክሱም፡መኩ፡አንተ፡* Aleqa Asres Yenesew claims that every nation in the world has two significant qualities (1959 [1951 EC]-a). These are destiny or purpose, and language or words. A country is said to have been defeated when an enemy succeeds in destroying or altering its purpose and language (1959 [1951 EC]-a, p. 63). He argues “language is the eye of a nation” (1959 [1951 EC]-a, p. 4). A country that loses its language becomes blind to its destiny. He refers to biblical and local sources to trace the origin of Ethiopian civilization. Following Genesis 11, he argues that until the Tower of Babel was destroyed there was only one language in the world. That language was spoken by Noah who sent his children to different parts of the world after the Great Flood. Kam, one of Noah’s children, came to Africa and his son Kussa gave birth to Ethiopis who founded the Ethiopian nation. By the time the languages of the world were divided into several branches at the Tower of Babel, Ge’ez had already become a well-established language in Ethiopia. The famous Ge’ez phrase *ኢኮነ ነግደ ወፈላሴ ሃገር ይቶሙ ለቅዱሳን ኢትዮጵያ* implies that the claim of scholars such as Conti Rossini and his followers to ascribe a sematic or South Arabian origin of civilization has no traditional or historical basis.

Asres Yenesew argues that the Ge’ez language is a key to deciphering important philosophical and spiritual mysteries (1959 [1951 EC]-b). There are 26 alphabets with 7 variations that correspond to the seven days of the week. The total number of syllogism represents equinox which is 182 days. Each alphabet has a numerical value that ranges from 1 to 5,600. As shown in Figure 2, the 26 letters in the first column starting from *U* to *T* have the following numerical values: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, 90, 100, 200, 300, 400, 500, 600, 700, and 800 (Bekerie, 1997, p. 87). These numbers could be calculated

to provide important messages. For example, the name of God, $\lambda\eta\eta\lambda\eta$, ($\lambda(40) + \eta(200) + \eta(80) + \lambda(40)$) equals 360 which represents the days of a year and degree of a circle. In the same way, the name Zion, $\theta\phi\gamma$ ($\theta(600) + \phi(90) + \gamma(30)$) equals 720 degrees. This measure represents the central 360 degree and external 360 degree angle of a center. As suggested by Asres Yenesew, only in the Ge'ez language God and his holy seat Zion are represented with the 360 degree showing the central location of the Ark of the Covenant (see Figure 1).

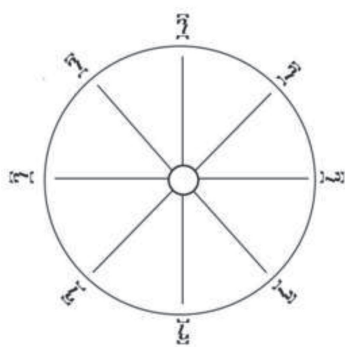


Figure 1: Debre Zion as Center (adapted from Yenesewu, 1959 [1951 EC]-b, p. 6)

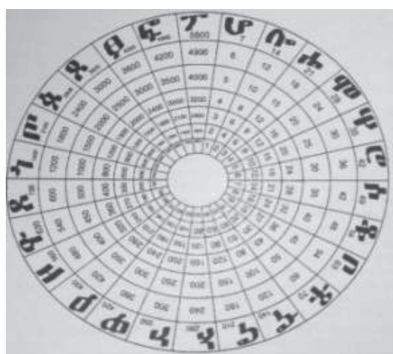


Figure 2: Numeric Values of the Ethiopic Writing System (Bekerie, 1997, p. 88)

Ethiopia is regarded as a covenant land, the second Zion, established by God to become the seat of his glory, mercy and blessings. Although she lacks in the manufacturing of firearms, she exceeds in wisdom (Yenesew, 1959 [1951 EC]-a). In this way, the Ethiopian traditional thought establishes Ethiopia not just as a place to live on but as the spiritual *center* of the lives of its inhabitants.

Wisdom and Knowledge

The Meaning of Wisdom

The Kebra Nagast provides important insights into the meaning of wisdom. In fact, the story of the Queen of Sheba can be regarded as a story

about the pursuit of wisdom. In dialogue with her followers she spoke, “blessed is the man who knoweth wisdom, that is to say compassion and the fear of God” (Kebra Nagast, 1932, pp. 24-27). The meaning of wisdom is embodied in these two broad concepts: the fear of God, and compassion which can also be regarded as humility. These concepts suggest wisdom as a form of vertical and horizontal pursuits. The vertical pursuit is related to the submission of the self to a supreme moral principle or God. The horizontal pursuit indicates the practice of compassion and humility in relating to the world. These two conceptions suggest wisdom as a way of being and becoming in the world. The meaning of wisdom can further be elaborated from the dialogue between the Queen and her nobles. As she was preparing to travel to Jerusalem, the Queen spoke:

Hearken, O ye who are my people, and give ye ear to my words. For I desire wisdom and my heart seekth to find understanding. I am smitten with the love of wisdom. wisdom is far better than treasure of gold and silver, and wisdom is the best of everything that hath been created on the earth...It maketh the ears to hear and hearts to understand, it is a source of joy for the heart, and a bright and shining lamp for the eyes; it is a teacher of those who learned...As for a kingdom, it cannot stand without wisdom (1932, pp. 20-24).

Her nobles, slaves, handmaidens, and counsellors answered and said to her:

O our lady, as for wisdom it is not lacking in thee; and it is because of your wisdom that thou loves wisdom. And to for us, if thou goest, we will go with thee, if thou sits down we will sit down with thee; our death shall be thy death, and our life with thy life (1932, pp. 20-24).

In the queen’s speech, wisdom is accorded the greatest significance: the search for wisdom is seen as equivalent to the search for “*the best of everything that hath been created on the earth*” (Kebra Nagast, 1932, emphasis added). The materialist pursuit of wealth such as the “treasure of gold and silver” are excluded from wisdom. Instead wisdom is what makes the ears to “hear and hearts to understand” and the eyes to see. It can be regarded as the trainer of the senses. A similar meaning could be drawn from one of the maxims of Eskendes the wise, who defined wisdom as follows:

Wisdom is...the eye of the soul; it sees all that is concealed and secret. It calls knowledge conscience. It inquiries into the wonders of the High God light that fills the soul (Sumner, 1981, p. 54).

Thus, wisdom is conceived as an endless journey towards the boundless knowledge of the creator. When the Queen noted, 'it is a teacher of those who learned', her nobles replied to her saying, "it is because of your wisdom that thou loves wisdom". This implies that the more a person becomes wise, the more that person seeks for wisdom. In the traditional education system, the Queen's long journey in search of wisdom is seen as a source of inspiration for the generation of Ethiopian youngsters to leave their villages and travel long distances in search of wise scholars who would teach them the great mysteries that are buried in the numerous Ge'ez books of the past. What is significant about this journey is not the attainment of book learning but the possibility of obtaining light to the eyes, nourishment to the soul and joy to the heart. In a more general sense, wisdom is the yearning of the soul.

This view of wisdom is related to the notion of the human being as the union of flesh and soul that have inconsistent desires. In the traditional school, students study that the human soul and the flesh were created with seven characteristics (Wagaw, 1990, pp. 37-38). Four characteristics belong to the flesh while three are that of the soul. The characteristics of the flesh include wind, fire, water and soil. The age classification may vary but on average, from birth to 15 years old a person lives as wind: fast, wild and less articulate but joyful. From the age of 15 to 30, one exists as fire: strong, emotional, sexually active, and sometimes dangerous. From the age of 30 to 60, the person lives as water: calm, reflective, witty, and capable of rendering decisions regarding the community. After the age of 60, the person reaches the soil stage of life, when the person bends towards the soil showing the great weight of wisdom accumulated in the soul, and walking on the soil becomes impossible without support. This teaching is so internalized in social life that even a strong and angry young person (fire) would calm down to listen to what an older person (water) has to say. In relation to wisdom, while the flesh provides the physical timeline of the person's life with variables that belong to the earth, the soul is considered to have three important characteristics obtained from God.

The three characteristics of the soul are the quality of being a thinking (ለባዊት), speaking (ነባቢት) and everlasting (ህያዊት) being. Wisdom enriches these qualities of the human soul. It enables the person to practice the good (to fear God and become empathic); it gives light, understanding and joy to the soul. Here an important distinction should be made between knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge can also be acquired by the soul but it primarily serves the flesh. It trains the flesh to be successful in earthly life but does not necessarily make the soul to see light. That means, not every knowledge is considered useful. For example, in the Kebra Nagast, knowledge of cross-fertilization practiced by children of Cain was considered wrong: “in the greatness of their filthiness they introduced the seed of the ass into the mare, and the mule came into being, which God had not commanded” (Kebra Nagast, 1932, p. 4). The quality of knowledge is determined by wisdom. Wisdom embodies God’s ethical principles; it serves as a discriminating criterion for truth: it verifies the validity, significance and relevance of knowledge to the good life. Considering knowledge as the property of the soul, Wagaw maintained:

Knowledge, skill, eloquence, and the gift of prophecy are acquired by the soul through the spirit of the Almighty. It follows, therefore, that in the act of learning the teacher plays a vital role as intermediary between the Spirit of God and the learner. The teacher’s position as a guide, interpreter of wisdom, and an authority are all unquestioned. He is feared, revered, and even loved. He is addressed as *yeneta* (Master) by his students (1990, p. 38).

The word “fear” in Wagaw’s interpretation of the student-teacher relationship in the traditional schools does not suggest the use of corporeal punishment (1990, p. 38). It should be interpreted by taking into account the humility and respect of both teachers and students to one another as the norm that guides the practice of learning. Similarly, the fear of God (ፈሪሃ እግዚአብሔር) and the fear of the human being (ፈሪሃ ሰብዕ) indicate reverence to the other, or being. Fear is not the emotional reaction of a threatened being. The person who fears is not an object; rather he/she is an agent who willfully enacts reverence towards being. In practice, fear is initiated due to the wisdom of the fearful not the power of the feared person or being. The view of wisdom as a trainer of the senses, and as

the practicing of compassion in human social relationships suggests that wisdom has a supreme source that exists beyond the cognitive faculties of the human body.

The Source of Wisdom

Ethiopian literary and oral expressions suggest that the originator of wisdom is God but human beings play a significant role in obtaining it. God provides not only wisdom but also the desire to know and the ability to understand. The journey of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon was presented as a quest for wisdom. It was believed that the initiator of that quest was God “for God had made her heart incline to go and had made her desire it” (Kebra Nagast, 1932, p. 19). The Queen said, “I went in through the doors of the treasury of wisdom, and I drew for myself the waters of understanding....and not myself only, but all the men of my country, the kingdom of Ethiopia” (Kebra Nagast, 1932).

Here, wisdom is viewed as a finished product stored in God’s treasury. It is not the outcome of individual ingenuity alone but a gift only God can give to those who follow the journey towards him. The view of God as the source of wisdom is important because God as the highest moral power makes it impossible for institutions and individuals to become owners and dispensers of wisdom. According to the Kebra Nagast, Solomon’s wisdom was a gift from God.

That gift was taken away when he was seduced into worshipping the Egyptian idols by a Pharaoh’s daughter. He was turned from wise to fool, from rich to poor, and from king to “a man of no account” (Kebra Nagast, 1932, pp. 66-91). The acquisition of wisdom is not the accumulation of knowledge in the mind, but the ability to submit the senses to the practice of empathy and love. Knowledge as a raw ingredient needs to change into wisdom in order to nourish the soul. A wise person does not own knowledge as a personal property; instead, by recognizing God as the source of all knowledge, he/she uses it to enhance his/her wisdom and serve better.

In *Arganona Mariyam*, a book that praises Mary with a series of metaphorical anaphora, the author claims that in order to reveal the glory of the Virgin he had to surrender his senses and listen to the glory that is unfolding before him. The glory is already written, the song already sung

long before he became aware of it, and the creator was the giver and the receiver of that glory. In order to reveal it, the author starts with prayer, pleading with the divine to open his heart and ears and to enable him to listen to the glory of Mary from the mouth of the Holy Ghost. Individuals do not invent or even articulate their own messages. They merely reveal to the world the knowledge that God had revealed to them in private.

A story about King Lalibela corroborates this interpretation. King Lalibela used to drink hemlock every Friday to remember the suffering of Jesus. One day, he drunk a poisoned hemlock and his body remained in a near death state for three days. During that time, God took his soul to the heavens and showed him the churches he would build on earth, in the future. Lalibela was astonished and asked God how he would accomplish building such a magnificent work. God replied saying, “the churches had already been built but are hidden till I reveal them through you. It is like giving you a key to enter a new house. I am the beginner and the finisher of the work.” (Interview, May 29, 2011). Later, Lalibela became King and spent 23 years building the churches.

Wisdom and the Non-Essential Other

The relationship between wisdom and the conception of good and evil reveals the purpose of knowledge and the ethical values that should guide the process of its acquisition. The view of wisdom as the pursuit to know the good and to practice it presupposes the existence of multiple objects of knowledge including good and evil. Reflecting on some aspects of western dualism could help exemplify the conception of good and evil in Ethiopian traditional thought. The dominant western philosophical tradition absolutizes the dichotomy between self and other, or good and evil. Using its own epistemological and intellectual tradition, it depicts and invents the identity of the colonial other (Said, 1978). Bhabha’s suggestion of “fixity,” which “connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition” illustrates the position of the other (1994, p. 66). Similar to how Foucault analyzed the comparison between the savage and the barbarian in the work of Boulainvilliers, in order for the self to create and remain in an established civilization (2004, pp. 194-197), the other has to always be defined as the embodiment of the self’s opposite qualities, and stay outside the civilization

so established. This can also be related to what Harvie Ferguson observed about modernity. He argued, “modernity as a break from the past... gained meaning only in relation to non-modern societies and cultures, so that any understanding of experience in terms of modernity is always liable to provoke a contrary perspective” (Ferguson, 2000, p. 3). The Ethiopian notion of good and evil cannot be seen as opposite or identical with the western conception of dualism. Dichotomist and antagonistic frames are commonly casted in understanding a given reality. However, it can be argued that the Ethiopian conception of dualism presupposes a non-essentialized and flexible other, and a compassionate self or soul. These two concepts are embodied in the idea of *irq*, which presupposes the possibility of negotiation and reconciliation between good and evil. Initially, the Kebra Nagast appears to give opposite qualities for good and evil. On a subsection about “the Kingdom of Adam,” the Kebra Nagast mentions the birth of good and evil at the time when Adam was driven out of the Garden. It says,

At that sorrowful moment Cain was born, and when Adam saw that the face of Cain was ill-tempered (or, sullen) and his appearance evil he was sad. And then Abel was born, and when Adam saw that his appearance was good and his face good-tempered he said, “This is my son, the heir of my kingdom” (Kebra Nagast, 1932, p. 3).

Abel and Cain became the first “seeds” of good and evil. Abel was described as God fearing, without envy, and good-tempered while Cain was a person who did not fear God. He was described as hot-tempered and envious, whose progeny lived “without law, without measure, and without rule” (Kebra Nagast, 1932, p. 4). Then, out of the matrimonial union between Abel’s and Cain’s children, those who believed in God and those who denied him, came the offspring of the good and the evil seeds. Here, it is possible to see that good and evil had the same sources. Symbolized by the brotherhood of Abel and Cain, both could stand in parallel, occupying the opposite realms of goodness and evil. Unlike the western notion of dualism that classes the two as complete opposites, the separation between good and evil was never considered absolute. In the Ethiopian tradition, it is possible to bring the two together through the process of reconciliation, *irq*, or forgiveness, *yiqirta*.

This view implies that reality is not a combination of irredeemable opposites that never change their position. There is a window for hope: a possibility that evil is redeemable. An interesting example of this possibility was presented in the hagiography of Kiristos Samra, an Ethiopian woman (she is consecrated as holy) who attempted to reconcile Satan with God. She prayed for several years asking God to forgive Satan and to end the war between good and evil. Her hagiography states that God actually listened to her prayer and allowed her to go and bring Satan if he wishes to reconcile with God. She went to Sheol and asked Satan to come out with her and make peace with God. Though Satan refused, she took numerous condemned souls out of Sheol to paradise. Then, God gave her the power to redeem numerous other souls from Sheol to heaven till the end of the world. The story is well known among Ethiopian *Tewahido* believers, and the possibility of condemned souls to be transferred from damnation to heaven is not contrary to the common belief of the population. Its significance indicates that in the general conception of dualism in Ethiopia, *evil does not have unalterable essence*; there is the assumption that through mediation it is possible to turn the bad into good, or to influence evil to become good.

Traditionally, holy persons are always regarded as mediators between good and evil. In one of the Miracles of Saint Mary, an 'evil person', who had killed and eaten seventy people, gave a few drops of water to a leper when he was asked in the name of Saint Mary. The murderer who is commonly known as *belaae sebb*, the cannibal, died and appeared before the throne of God where Saint Mary appeared and casted her shadow in favor of him. Consequently, he was delivered from damnation. Kaplan (1984, p. 83) noted that "Like the angels, the monastic holy man was recognized as a mediating figure capable of reaching and influencing a distant God". Here, Kaplan's reference to the mediating monks as 'men' should be considered to include females. Female saints such as Kiristos Samra, Arsema, Maskel Kibra and others are said to have played significant mediatory roles between the holy and the sinful (Interview, 14 April, 2011).

It is important to notice the parallel development of political mediation along with the belief in spiritual mediation. Kaplan noted that "with the consolidation of the Solomonic rule [in Ethiopia] there arose in the religious sphere a pattern of lord-mediator-client relations which paralleled those of the political system" (1984, p. 83). This philosophical

and cultural tradition has been reflected in reconciliation ceremonies between a murderer and a victim's relatives; or in the tradition of pardoning rebels (*shifta*) by traditional leaders. A recent practice of the Addis Ababa University students' protest against the government presupposed the existence of a sacred ground between opposing forces. During the 1993 university students' protest in Addis Ababa, the students decided to shelter in the Saint Mary Church of *Amist Killo*. The assumption was that the government forces would never take brutal measures in the compound of the church. A student mentioned to me how thousands of students gathered and sat peacefully in the church, and how he felt that the only safe place to be at that time was the church of Kidane Mihret, the Covenant of Mercy, which is also next to the residence-office of the Patriarch of the Orthodox Church. However, the traditional expectation was dashed, and government forces took the advantage to surround the church. They entered the compound without resistance, forced the students into military trucks and took them to a detention center outside the capital. As will be shown in later chapters, as the country moved from traditional sources of knowledge and power to western sources, the concept of dualism also radically shifted towards not just antagonistic but also essentialist and instrumentalist bifurcation between what is regarded as good and evil. Under this conception, the possibility of *irq*, reconciliation, has hardly been possible.

In the Ethiopian tradition, good and evil are viewed as conflicting differences with possible spaces of negotiation rather than as essential qualities of a singular reality. Consequently, the resolution of differences is not preempted by violence. There are relational spaces that allow for coexistence or mediation. For example, although those who practice sorcery and magic are disapproved, they are accepted to live in the community and play social roles as healers and reconcilers. Blacksmiths are often feared for having "evil eye" /*buda*/. Asres Yenesew, argues that the association of evil with blacksmiths was not part of the Ethiopian tradition (1959 [1951 EC]-a). Italians and foreign missionaries introduced the idea of evil eye in order to discourage the production of military and farm equipment by local artisans and smiths so as to make the country a weak prey for European colonialism. Despite this radical othering of skilled persons from the rest of society, blacksmiths still play indispensable roles in the production of farm and household equipment such as

ploughshares and knives. The primacy of wisdom over knowledge, its conception as compassion, and the framing of the other as a dynamic and flexible agent allows ethical and relational spaces to emerge within and among seemingly antagonistic differences and diverse identities. It is important to understand the differences between Ethiopian traditional thought and the modernist conception of dualism which is introduced largely through the western education system. Traditionally, the meaning of wisdom is not the acquisition of knowledge or skill with the view to control, eliminate, or become superior over the seemingly opposite or different others. As the world is believed to inhabit various forces that are not essentially antagonistic and doomed to resolve through conflict, wisdom is qualified by the fear of God, the practice of compassion and the self-humility of the individual. To be wise is not to exceed in knowledge but to guide one's life towards the Covenant.

Humility of the Soul as an Attribute of Wisdom

Within western notions of the self and other, humility is often understood as a lack of self-esteem or confidence. This individual-centered approach accepts no higher value or greater power above the interest of the self. As the self is imagined to be the superior center of one's being, its humility before anything diminishes its worth and power. Senghor attempted to reject this conception by proposing humility as the self's method of knowing the other:

The Negro African does not draw a line between himself and the object; he does not hold it at a distance, nor does he merely look at it and analyse it....he takes it vibrant in his hands, careful not to kill it or fix it....He touches it, feels it and smells it...the Negro African sympathises, abandons his personality to become identified with the Other, he dies to be reborn in the Other (1964, pp. 72-73).

In the Ethiopian tradition, one cannot find an exact equivalent of the term self. However, the soul appears to include many of the attributes commonly given to the self by modern western philosophy. The soul exists in reverence to the supreme moral being, which is also the moral essence of everything. In order to be closer to God – to receive wisdom or

to learn – it searches for the moral essence in everything: it thinks about, communicates with and lives through compassion and humility.

From this perspective, the interest of the self (soul) is not to ensure the preservation of life (flesh) but the subjugation of the latter to fulfill the highest ideal (covenant). Humility, modesty, fear and respect are important qualities. The Kebra Nagast commends the importance of humility as follows:

All the arrogant among men walk in [the Devil's] way and they shall be judged with him. And God loveth the lowly-minded, and those who practice humility walk in His way, and they shall rejoice in His kingdom (1932, p. 24).

Further, the Kebra Nagast regards the wise person as analogous to a person who has water for the thirsty, food for the hungry, healing for the sick, and apparel for the naked (1932, p. 18). This has important implications in setting a moral standard for the behavior of leaders and the expectation of their people. The king was expected to be wise. He was expected to manifest kindness to the people, and respect the laws of God.

The view of the king as a wise “shepherd of his people” (Molvaer, 1980, p. 30) who is kind and caring, enabled him to exercise patronage on matters that came into his attention. It also required the absolute obedience and submission of the people to his will. This submissive effect that the Kebra Nagast promoted among the population cannot be defended. In practice, many Ethiopian Kings and their dignitaries subjected the population to various forms of repressions (Tibebu, 1995). However, at least in theory, the conception of wisdom as humility and compassion tempered the absolutism of the King. God is imagined not just as a powerful master but more importantly as a merciful father (Interview, March 20, 2011). Likewise, the king had to rule in the likeness of God to maintain his power without resorting to coercion. The Kebra Nagast provides “In what way is the king superior if he hath not done good upon the earth to the poor?” (1932, p. 99).

The chronicles of several Ethiopian Kings explains their humility as the source of their strength. Islamic sources attest that when the King of Ethiopia received the messenger of Prophet Muhammad, “he came

down the throne and sat on the ground to show his humbleness and respect for Allah's Apostle, our Master Muhammad" (Ja'far al-Tayyar). In the chronicle of Emperor Yemrehanna Kiristos, the King was reported to have prayed:

Oh my Lord, how could I reign over your people? I am deficient in intelligence and inferior to all people. Consider carefully whom do you make reign over your people, for you my Lord know the littleness of my heart. Could I ever be in charge of the affairs of the kingdom or could I declare the laws right? (Krawczuk, 1934, p. 11).

The response to his prayer God replied:

There is no victory in battle for worriers and there is no race for the swift, there is no wealth for plunderers and there won't be food for the learned nor kingdom, nor governance for the wise – [if it is] without my spirit... Now then I shall make you intelligent and give you wisdom... I shall enlighten your heart with a torch of wisdom (1934, p. 11).

The above quotes underscore humility as an important principle that guided the moral discourse of power in tradition. Several chronicles and manuscripts consistently underscore the fallibility of the Kings rather than their invincibility. According to Kaplan the model of the ideal King was a monk: "When [King] Lalibela had assumed the throne, he submitted himself to a fast more severe than that of the monks, because to him the kingship appeared as a monastic life" (1984, p. 12). Moreover, King Yikuno Amlak "would bow several times praying wearing sack" (1984, p. 13). King Kaleb, King Susneyous, Motalame, and many other political figures gave up their power becoming monastic hermits. Emperor Zara Yacob's letter to Jerusalem reflected the significance of humility: "My beloved, do not you offer to say, Light descended only upon us, that glorying in yourself be not in vain; since you know that evil attends glorying and blessing humility" (qtd. in M. Russell, 1833, p. 226).

What the above analysis shows is that irrespective of the historicity of the great qualities of the kings, humility, justice, and spirituality are widely regarded as political and social virtues. Traditionally, these virtues are regarded as the qualities of all educated persons. The common Amharic

proverb *yetemare yigdelegne* which literally means “let my death be caused by a learned person” indicates the respect and trust an educated person enjoys in the Ethiopian tradition. The proverb implies that a learned person is wise; he/she cannot harm without justice, or he/she is not cruel enough to kill you even if you wanted him/her to kill you. The Kebra Nagast supports the innocence and harmlessness of the wise person as follows:

The honouring of wisdom is the honouring of the wise man, and the loving of wisdom is the loving of the wise man. Love the wise man and withdraw not thyself from him, and by the sight of him thou shalt become wise; hearken to the utterance of his mouth, so that thou shalt become like unto him (Kebra Nagast, 1932, pp. 20-24).

The influence of this view is quite visible in traditional schools where greater respect is awarded for teachers. Teachers are called *yeqelem abat* / pen father/, in the way a priest is called *yenefise abat* / soul father/. It is important that the character of the teacher should reflect the lived meaning of humility without which such reverence may not be awarded (Interview, April 13, 2011). For example, prospective students who want to study *Qine* in the school of poetry would travel to the teacher's home which often would be far away from their own residence. On their arrival, they may not be readily accepted until their stamina and manner is noted and their previous study verified. Once their background and resilience is checked, often through meticulous questioning rather than documentation, the teacher would perform the ceremony of acceptance. He would kneel in front of the new students and wash their feet as a sign of registration in his school. This practical lesson in humility orients the manner and tone of the relationship that would guide schooling for the years to come. Humbled by this act of extreme humility, the students remain vigilant and faithful to their tasks (Interview, April 13, 2011). Every day, at the end of their classes, the students bless their teacher with the following metaphorical expression of wisdom:

May God cause thy word to be heard, and make thee to arrive at the earth in Debra Libanos and to be evergreen like the cibaha! May he broaden thee as the sycamore [Warka] and cause thee to shine as the moon! (qtd. in S. Pankhurst, 1955, p. 522).

The above interpretation does not mean to suggest that knowledge is inversely related to the exercise of power. Although knowledge is considered to be the gift of God, the capacity to be heard and to influence the views and activities of others, or the ability to put it to good use, is related to one's level of learning in the traditional school system. Students at the lower level of their studies obey their seniors (Interview, March 21, 2011). However, the seniors had to be wise enough—humble and compassionate—to earn the respect of their juniors. Here, while knowledge augers the widest possibility for the exercise of power over the less knowledgeable ones, the honoring of wisdom as humility limited the manner in which that power could be exercised. In general, the significant influence the Kebra Nagast places among the students of the traditional education system, which will be discussed in the next chapter, was summarized by Kebede:

The impregnation of students with the spirit of Kebra Nagast enabled them to see the world from the viewpoint of Ethiopia. In a word, the discourse centered Ethiopia by endowing it with a specific mission, which became the repository of its national identity (2006, p. 51).

Conclusion

By creating the imagination of Ethiopia as the center of the world, the Ark of the Covenant gave a supreme validating power to Ethiopia's national interests. This chapter shows how this belief helped Ethiopia exist as a nation. It argued that the Kebra Nagast contains political and social values that created vertical and horizontal relationships in the country. The concept of covenant created the imagination of a chosen nation ruled by the ideal king who governs in the moral likeness of God. The king was considered superior and the nation was regarded sacred. Socially, the Kebra Nagast provided values that guided the ethical basis of right conduct. The conception of knowledge as a gift from God, and wisdom as a discriminating criterion between good and evil, suggests the significance of relevance and ethics to knowledge. In the Kebra Nagast, wisdom was considered as the fear of God and the practice of compassion, implying vertical and horizontal connectedness. Vertically, wisdom connects the person with the highest ideal; horizontally it relates the

person to others through compassion and humility. In this regard, the ideal self (soul) is not an independent, self-centered and self-motivated individual. It is instead a being with a vertical connection with covenant, and a horizontal connection with society. Wisdom as the trainer of the senses helps the person achieve, maintain and expand his/her relational identities. The concept of *irq* is one way of expanding this connectedness. By drawing good and evil on opposite but non-fixed planes, the concept of *irq* emphasizes the various possibilities through which evil could be accepted or reconciled with the good rather than abandoned or destroyed.

The privileging of western philosophy in Africa is often justified by an apparent absence or primitivism of African philosophy, something that this chapter clearly contests. The existence of Ethiopia with “historical continuity and political independence, written language, and written philosophy” (Sumner, 2005, p. 15) disproves the Hegelian assertion that Africa “is no historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit” (Hegel, 1956, p. 99). It also offers an indigenous insight to the conjecture that “the great danger that threatens Africa is the absence of ideology” (Fanon, 1967, p. 186). The above thesis of the absence of indigenous political thought in Africa has been blamed on colonialism. However, as will be demonstrated in the forthcoming chapters, Ethiopia, being the only uncolonized African country, has fallen under the same thesis of primitivism and absence. The Kebra Nagast, as one source of national ideology, and the traditional intellectual legacy of the country as presented in the next chapter, shows that the dismissal of tradition and the imitation of western systems was motivated by the power interest of political leaders and not by the requirement of modernization. The dismissal of tradition is a form of violence that allowed the creation of institutions, systems and structures that have excluded the intellectual legacy of traditional scholars and the cultural experiences of the majority of Ethiopians, just as colonialism did to indigenous populations in other parts of the world.

CHAPTER 3

Traditional Schooling and Indigenous Knowledge Production

“Sovereignty profiteth nothing without purity, and judgment profiteth nothing without justice, and riches profiteth nothing without the fear of God” (Kebra Nagast, 1932, p. 60).

Introduction

Ethiopia’s intellectual legacy developed under the purview of the key principles of the Kebra Nagast. Such key principles as covenant and wisdom provided a sense of direction and purpose to traditional education, and enabled Ethiopian scholars to *interpret rather than imitate* knowledge from international sources. These values were ingrained in the daily lessons of the students of the traditional school system, and in the minds of traditional scholars who translated various books from Greek, Hebraic, and Arabic sources. This chapter will exemplify the interpretative mindset the Ethiopian education system upheld among its students by examining the process of traditional schooling, traditional literature and philosophy, and the role of traditional scholars in society. The chapter will show the existence of an indigenous epistemological tradition that utilized an interpretative paradigm to evaluate the relevance and significance of knowledge, one which was later supplanted by new models imitated from the West without any consideration of the rich heritage that already existed in the country.

Traditional Education, Traditional Scholars and the Church

Traditional education in Ethiopia had a school system that could be regarded as the intellectual core of Ethiopians' self-understanding and self-knowledge (Ephraim Isaac, 1971). The traditional schools became centers of learning for sixteen centuries until they were progressively supplanted by westernized government schools since the middle of the 20th century. Nevertheless, the schools are still important, especially in the lives of the rural Christian majority. Aklilu Habte considered that the exact number of Ethiopian traditional schools is not known but modest estimates suggest that there are about 30,000 to 35,000 traditional schools still operating in the country today (2010). It has also been estimated that 25 per cent of the Ethiopian male population are ecclesiastics (Tamene, 1998, p. 96). These numbers suggest that traditional education still plays an important part in contemporary Ethiopian society. This is consistent with my research in the town of Lalibela and the surrounding areas, where traditional scholars and their students are active participants in social and cultural life. They uphold nationalistic perspectives, play spiritual and secular roles, and promote a cultural life through intellectual activities that are centered on the beliefs and philosophies of Orthodox Church tradition.

The most important contribution of the traditional education system is the consolidation of a social, political, and cultural center in the country. The church has been the major agent in this process. Its traditional school system produced scholars who played pivotal roles in the lives of their society by acting as spiritual fathers, exorcists, preachers, hymnists, healers, mediators, counselors, judges and so on. The detailed fields of study and the average years of completion of each field is provided in the table below.

Field of Study	Average Time of Completion
<i>Nibab Bet</i> (House of Reading)	2 years
<i>Zema Bet</i> (House of Hymn): <i>tosome deggwua, mierraf</i> and <i>deggwua</i>	4 years

Field of Study	Average Time of Completion
<i>Kidassie Bet</i> (House of Holy Mass): <i>kidassie</i> and <i>seatat</i>	6 months
<i>Zema Bet</i> : <i>zimare</i> and <i>mewasit zema</i>	1 year
<i>Zema Bet</i> : <i>akwakwam</i>	3 years
<i>Qine Bet</i> (House of Poetry)	5 years
<i>Metsehaf Bet</i> (House of Books): <i>biluy</i> and <i>haddis tirguamme</i>	4 years
<i>Liqawunit</i> (interpretation of the books of scholars and monasticism)	3 years
<i>Merha Ewur</i> (mathematical computation of time)	6 month
<i>Yetarik Tinat</i> (the study of history)	1 year
<i>Yetegibare'ed timhirt</i> (art and handicrafts, such as the art of painting, writing manuscripts on leather, sculpture, religious artefacts, binding books and so on)	4 years
<i>Masmesker</i> (certification)	2 years
Total years of study in the traditional education system	30 years

Table 1: Fields of study in the traditional school system (adapted from Kalewolde, 1965, pp. 1-2).

However, based on their spiritual and intellectual roles, one can observe two groups of scholars in the traditional education system. The first group are graduates of the School of Holy Mass, *Kidassie Bet*, and the School of Hymn, *Zema Bet*, whose function concentrated mainly within the confines of the Orthodox Church, giving religious services to believers. The second group are graduates of the School of Poetry, *Qine Bet* and the School of Books, *Metsehaf Bet*. These scholars are commonly known as *dabtaras* and their functions address religious and secular life transcending religious, ethnic and other divides in the country.

According to Shelemay, the multifaceted role of *dabtaras* as healers, magicians and counselors created a deep interaction among several belief systems in Ethiopia (1992). The *dabtaras* used “words-of-power” derived from the three most important religions of the country, namely Christianity, Islam and Judaism, to produce their books and scrolls, called *kitab*s.

In addition to Ge'ez, Hebraic, and Greek names, "the Arab names of God, Allah, and 'Muhammad' and 'Nabi' (prophet), and 'Rasul' (messenger) were treated as magical names and are often found in the amulets, and also transcripts of Greek forms of the names and titles of Christ" (Budge, 1928, p. 598). The *dabtaras* still use these names in their *kitabs* for spiritual healing (Interview, March 13, 2011). In a country where the majority of Ethiopians (80%) live in remote rural villages and hamlets without access to public services, the role of traditional scholars is still of paramount importance. In these villages, as is visible in the surroundings of Lalibela, secular life is connected to religious life, and this intermix is sustained through the teaching of traditional scholars whose function concentrated around the provision of secular and religious services near the church. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church could be regarded as the center of social and cultural life, and the scholars of the church as the coordinators of that life.

Often built with a circular architecture, at the most exalted place in the village or town, the church represents the central point with which the surrounding life is deemed connected (Interview, May 21, 2012). It embodies the highest moral authority, and is a sacred ground where individuals cannot enter without removing their shoes. Activities in the house and on the field are dictated by the regulations of the church. Social customs and individual behavior such as marriage, burial, farming, eating and singing are regulated by established religious customs that could be traced to the daily teachings of the church. Most national holydays, such as the founding of the True Cross (*Meskel*), Christmas (*Lidet*), Epiphany (*Timket*), Good Friday (*Siklet*) and Easter (*Tinsae*), are attributes of the church to the national holidays of the country. By addressing the country as a single entity, by training its scholars with a perspective that perceived the land as a covenant nation, and by promoting wisdom – adherence to higher values of spiritualism, humility, service and honor – the church imparted a national consciousness among a large section of the Ethiopian population. It produces scholars whose knowledge and vocation is deeply grounded in the cultural life of the people. Thus, the development of a national culture in Ethiopia is closely associated with the intellectual contribution of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. As Isaac argued, "as well as being the institution through which religious continuity was maintained, the Ethiopian church school served as the main instrument for the development and propagation of a national culture, and for the

creation of a national literature” (1971, p. 10). He further emphasized the role of the schools in maintaining a strong link between the culture of the people and religion.

The purpose and content of education are religious, but it must be noted that since in Ethiopia religion and life are intricately tied together, the learned man is not required to be a priest. Nor can the society function in the traditional sense without the enlightenment and guidance of the men of learning – all students of religion (1971, p. 14).

For Isaac, it is “alienation from the church on the part of the many educated people” that “retarded [Ethiopia’s] fuller participation in modern education” (1971, p. 15). Because traditional scholars understand the philosophy, language, literature, history, and tradition of the people better than those educated based on the European model of education in Ethiopia, until now the former have influenced the lives of the people more deeply and directly than the latter. Consequently, “university trained people to a certain extent lag behind the traditional scribes in producing substantial works of literature and scholarship” (1971, p. 15). Isaac stressed the inclusion of traditional knowledge, especially *Qine*, in the modern Ethiopian system of education without which “Ethiopian self-understanding and national consciousness” could not be maintained (1971, pp. 1-16). So far, I have stressed the role and contribution of traditional scholars, especially *dabtaras*, as promoters of national consciousness among diverse groups in the country, with the Orthodox Church as a social and cultural center. The process through which these scholars were trained shows the existence of a national intellectual legacy that developed and passed from generation to generation for several centuries, long before an imitated form of western education was transplanted into the country.

Education in the Traditional School System

The Ethiopian traditional education system has a well-developed curriculum, text books and method of instruction. There are two levels of study which include the ordinary and advanced level of studies (Wodajo, 1959). The ordinary level of study includes the House of Reading (*Nibab Bet*), and the House of Mass (*Kidassie Bet*). The advanced level of study

includes the House of Hymn (*Zema Bet*), the House of Poetry (*Qine Bet*), and the House of Books (*Metsehaf Bet*). Each school has multiple stages and branches of learning that enable students to develop religious and secular skills and knowledge. It is hardly possible to complete studying the entire content of the education system. However, about twenty-eight years of study may enable a person to learn most of it and gain the rare title “*arat ayina*,” which literarily means the “Four Eyed” (Wagaw, 1990, p. 31). The title suggests the completion of the four fields of study in the House of Books (see below) and refers to the ability of the scholar to see the past as well as the future. In addition to literary, linguistic and liturgical skills, students internalize key principles that help them understand their role in society and guide their action.

Students, except those in the house of reading, view their intellectual journey as a spiritual experience or destiny. A typical explanation from one *dabtara* summarizes the key values and principles internalized among the students:

When I realized that I was *chosen* by the will of God to serve Him by praising His name, I made a solemn *covenant* to follow my calling to the end. Then, I wandered for Fifteen years across Gondar, Gojam, Shewa and Wollo learning from respected scholars, meditating the mysteries in the great books, practicing the right standing and singing, and praying to become *wise*. Now, I feel like I am a tree whose leaves never wither. I am *planted* here, in the House of God, to *serve* His will. May glory be to Him, Amen! (Interview, March 12, 2011)

Choiceness or calling, covenant, wisdom, centeredness (to be “planted”), and service represent some of the key qualities that are promoted through long years of education. As shown in the previous chapter, the coming of the Ark of the Covenant is regarded as an expression of divine choice to make Ethiopia the center of the world. Choice expresses the will of God that transcends human understanding. In the act of choosing, the individual is regarded as an object, not a subject. It is God who chooses the destiny of the individual. This is illustrated by the common Amharic proverb, “*ke'enchet merito le'tabot, kesewu merito leshumet*” which means as a tree is chosen from trees for *tabot* (to make a replica of the Ark of the Covenant), a man is chosen from men for an office.

Choice or God's Will may be inferred from a sign such as a dream or from the fulfilment of a wish, or from the personal disposition of the individual. It is believed that the individual would be naturally inclined towards a certain destiny, *enjera*, and one can understand his/her destiny by looking at the various skills and interests he/she already has. Traditional scholars argue that God's choice cannot be inferred from circumstances that do not reflect His qualities (Interview, March 15, 2012). The search for wisdom through prayer, fasting and the practice of humility enables the person to fulfil the will of the creator.

The person who believed or accepted the will of God makes *covenant*, a solemn promise, to follow his/her calling. Referring to the harsh student-life, such as the need to sustain oneself at school by begging for food in the village, one student remembered, "without the view of one's calling as a covenant between the Almighty and oneself, the ordeal of going through extreme poverty for the sake of education is unthinkable" (Interview, March 12, 2011). What is learned in this process is *wisdom*. As shown in the previous chapter, to be wise is to enrich the soul at the expense of the flesh; to accumulate in order to distribute; to have in order to give and serve. Thus, the learned man manifests a deeper sense of humility known in Ge'ez as "*atihitote-ries*," which means the humility of the self (Interview, March 15, 2011). During an interview, a church scholar emphasized that, "a learned man is like a tree that never stops yielding fruit. His life is *centered* at the intersection of vertical and horizontal axis of service: vertically reverence to God, and horizontally service to God's creation" (Interview, May 22, 2011). The metaphor of the tree expresses the need to be centered on something more important than oneself, to have roots in society. Brief analysis of the major schools of the traditional education system reveals the above key axiological imperatives.

Ordinary Level of Study in the Traditional Education System

Nibab Bet

The first level of study in the traditional education system is the *Nibab Bet*, which can be translated as the House of Reading. It focuses on the development of skills that enables the student to read and understand key

social and religious concepts. In addition to reading, the student learns simple writing with arithmetic. To graduate from this level of study, the student has to practice “correct reading of Ge’ez” through six successive stages. Here, reading skill is not equated with the capacity to identify the words in a text. “It involves knowledge of the right tone and letter that should be used in a particular text” (Interview, May 19, 2011). Depending on the context used, words or letters that sound the same could have varying meanings or characters.

Learning the right reading at the *Nibab Bet* takes place in four successive levels. First is *fidel gebeta*, which is simple counting of the 270 letters from right to left, then from top to bottom, with slow and medium rhythmic dictation followed by fast counting in the same fashion. The student also learns the Ethiopian numerals. Once tested and passed this stage, the student will start the next stage of counting, which is called *a-bu-gi-da*. At this stage, the alphabets are all mixed up, making it difficult for the student to identify them by their positions in the *fidel gebeta*. The teachers believe that the mixing up of the alphabet in the *a-bu-gi-da* helps to reduce the effect of rote learning (Interview, May 19, 2011), for which the *Nibab Bet* is often criticized (Wodajo, 1959). Then, a student who could correctly identify the letters passes *a-bu-gi-da*, and is provided with a text from the Epistle of St. John to start the third level of reading.

Reading at the third stage comprises four modes of reading. These are reading with *kutir* (counting each letter in each word), *ge’ez or netela nibab* (reading with slow rhythmic chanting of each word), *urd nibab* (reading with faster rhythmic chanting of each phrase), followed by *nibab* (fast and loud reading). The fourth and fifth stages of the *Nibab Bet* are devoted to strengthening the reading abilities of the student by providing him/her with more texts from the Acts of the Apostles, and from the Gospels. The six and last stage is the practice of reading using the Book of Psalms and other biblical songs. The student reads the Psalm with the three sounds called *tire-nibab*, *urd*, and *nibab*, paying attention to sounds that need stress intonation, rhythm, and speed. The 150 chapters of the Psalm are divided into each of the seven days. Once the student is able to read the Psalm together with the Songs of Solomon and the Songs of other Prophets in the Bible with a fast and loud voice, he or she would graduate from the *Nibab Bet*. The time required to complete studies at *Nibab Bet* depends on the ability of the student to learn fast.

But, the average student takes two year to read fluently both in Ge'ez and Amharic (Interview, May 19, 2011). Graduation ceremonies vary from place to place. Often, the ceremony includes the invitation of the teacher to the home of the student, gifts given to the teacher by the parents, and the preparation of feasts and invitation of neighbors.

The second goal of the *Nibab Bet* is socialization. At the school, stories, proverbs, jokes, manner of sitting, speaking, walking, the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament, and the Six Commandments of the New Testament are repeatedly explained to the students in plenary sessions. Respect to elders, parents, and anybody older in age is always emphasized. Although the *Kebra Nagast* is not used as a textbook, the story of the Queen of Sheba and the coming of the Ark of the Covenant to Ethiopia are among the stories told to the students. At this stage, the student starts to become familiar with the various spiritual and material concepts of society. For example, through the study of the Mystery of Creation or *Miestre Fitret*, students start to understand the creationist concept of the origin of life. They also study the “five pillars of the church” which include the Mystery of Trinity, Mystery of Incarnation, Mystery of Baptism, Mystery of Holy Communion, and Mystery of Resurrection. The teaching of most of these concepts takes place in the form of questions and answers. An example of the teaching on the Mystery of Trinity takes place in a question and answer method as follows:

Questioner: Who created you?

Respondent: *Silasee*, /the trinity/

Question: How many are Selassie?

Respondent: One and three.

Question: What makes them one, and what makes them three?

Respondent: They are three in name, in task, and in person. They are one in divinity, in power, in glory, and in similar things of this sort they are one.

Questioner: Can you give me an example.

Respondent: The sun has shape, light and heat. But I say one sun not three...

The learning process allows the student to participate, however, the ideas spoken are not theirs. Students have to memorize each of the questions

with their corresponding answers word for word. The practice of memorization is important for the student as study by memorization is the dominant mode of learning in the traditional school system. The method has been criticized as a form of 'rote' learning. According to Wodajo, "there is hardly any place for understanding or for the cultivation of a creative imaginative mind" (1959, p. 25). Moreover, most texts used to practice reading are in Ge'ez, the old Ethiopian language used only in the churches. Students in the *Nibab Bet* hardly understood the significance of the concepts. They simply aim at impressing their teacher, their parents, and other audiences by reading the Ge'ez scriptures fast and without committing any mistakes. The social incentive of appreciating good reading as "*yibel*" by church scholars at a church festival is a great source of pride for a graduate of the *Nibab Bet*.

Despite the criticisms of this form of learning, the traditional school teachers consider rote memory as essential instrument for the training of the mind. A traditional school teacher thinks the act of teaching through memorization is similar to the act of farming.

The farmer ploughs the land to bury the raw seed under the soil. The seed eventually dies in the soil and grows up as a plant after it elapsed a certain period of time. Likewise, rote learning is similar to sowing the raw seed of knowledge in the mind of the student to allow it to grow at the later stages of his/her education (Interview, May 23, 2011).

The argument of the traditional school is that rote learning at the earliest age will plant the most essential beliefs and values of society in the mind of the student. At the primary level, these values and beliefs do not require critical reflection. They need to be "inherited" as treasures of the forbearers' long years of spiritual and intellectual tradition. Thus, they are destined to the realm of the heart (*lib*), memory. Furthermore, the mind requires initial content on which to exercise critical reflection. Whether rejected or accepted, what is provided at the earliest stage serves as a starting point of intellectual inquiry, and the Ethiopian traditional school system should orient the direction of that inquiry at the earliest possible age. The study of the dogmas and values helps students to utilize Ethiopia's religious and cultural traditions as the starting point of their future intellectual growth.

Another argument regarding the lack of detailed critical study and reflection comes from the claim that the detailed content of the lessons are too complex to explain to the students at their lower stage of learning. This is especially true in relation to the numerical computation of various Ge'ez concepts, names and time. For example each of the Ge'ez alphabets is invented with corresponding numerical values. These values extend to cover a complex calculation of time from the beginning to the end of the world. Students are taught to identify the Ge'ez numerals without learning their relationship with the alphabets. At the higher level of the education system, interested students could study the computation of time from specialized teachers of *merha ewur*. The interrelated nature of the various schools suggests that the *Nibab Bet* is merely the beginning of a rich and complex intellectual journey.

In summary, the House of Reading teaches key skills, values and dispositions to the student. The student acquires the skill of reading Ge'ez texts and the Ethiopian writing system, which is the authentic and indigenous invention of ancient Ethiopian scholars (Bekerie, 1997). He/she also learns metaphysical concepts that define the meaning of existence and provide the intellectual framework and context for thinking. The process of learning also helps to develop cooperative and integrative social dispositions. Students who complete reading will have the option either to go to the public school or to continue in the subsequent level of studies within the traditional school system. Several teachers claim that students who attended the House of Reading become more successful when they join the public school (Interview, March 12, 2011). Most of them passed two semester classes in one semester, and were able to socially integrate well with others. Students who prefer to advance their intellectual pursuit within the traditional education system continue to the next level of study in the traditional school system, the *Kidassie Bet*.

Kidassie Bet

The second level of study in the traditional school is the study of liturgy in the House of the Holy Mass. This is a speciality reserved primarily for the training of priests and deacons but students who do not want to become priests could go to other schools of their choice. The training in the function of deacons is called *gibre dikuna*, and that of priests is called *gibre*

kissina. Ethiopian church tradition provides that *Kidassie* came from the Ge'ez verb "*kedesse*" which means *amesegene* or "to become thankful" (Interview, March 15, 2011). There are twenty Anaphors used during the holy mass of *Kidassie*. Most of these Anaphors are dedicated to saints, as the Ethiopian monks who produced them never used their own name to express ownership over their intellectual work. (Ejigu, 2004). Priests and deacons study the texts and hymns for the Mass and other services. The reverence to *Kidassie* is so important that all able-bodied persons around the church remain standing from the beginning to the end. This normally takes from 2 to 3 hours. According to Priest Kassie:

Once the *Kidassie* is started, heavenly angels would descend and fall on the unoccupied floor of the church, in front of the Ark of the Covenant. People who enter or move inside the church at that time risk bringing upon themselves *meqsefit*, a punishment for contempt as they could be stepping on the angels that fall in front of the *tabot* (Interview, March 19, 2011).

The *tabot* is the replica of the Ark of the Covenant which is placed at the center or the *sanctum sanctorum* of the church. By studying the various Anaphors and related hymns, students of *Kidassie Bet* prepare themselves to render regular spiritual services to the public by singing and performing rituals in front of the *tabot*. Graduation from this school will lead to eligibility for ordination as a priest or a deacon. The authority of the priests is believed to be equivalent to the authority of the twelve disciples of Jesus in the Bible (Interview, March 19, 2011). Kassie noted that "Priests are like shepherds; they hold the key to open the gates of heaven." Deacons are generally assistants for the priests. They read the holy manuscripts of the church to the public during the Holy Mass, and assist in the preparation of the Eucharist. Priests function as confessors and are called *nefis abat* (soul father).

Every Orthodox household in Ethiopia is expected to have one *nefis abat*. The *nefis abat* would regularly visit the home of his soul children, help them resolve issues within the family, remind them of monthly and annual observations of fasting, and impose penances for confessions. A priest leads regular prayers and any person meeting him on the road would bow while approaching to kiss the cross in the priest's hand saying

“*yifugne abate*” which means “set me free my father”. The priest would respond “*em’maesere hatiyat Egziabher yifta*” which literally means “may God set you free from the bondage of sin”. This and similar functions of the priest and deacon are pivotal in the cultural life of the people of Lalibela, and other parts of the country in Ethiopia.

With the replica of the *tabot* at its most inner center, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is called *bete kirstian*, which literally means “the House of Christians”. Only priests are allowed to touch or carry the *tabot*. According to Lisanework Gebre Giyorgis, *tabot* means medicine, as it is considered to be a holy vessel that carried the medicine that healed the world (1997, p. 78). It is also regarded as *medagna*, a means of salvation, a source of divine providence. In the *Kidassie*, the Mother of Jesus, the Ark of Noah, and the Tablets of Moses are frequently analogized. Mary is like “the Ark of Noah through which he [Noah] was saved from the evil’s destruction” (Daoud & Wolde-Kirkos, 1959, p. 76). The following song in the *Kidassie* also reflects the same perspective:

Mother of martyrs!
A pure palace, beauteous and fair!
Ark which contained the law,
Fair in raiment of gold, clad with divers colours (Rodwell, 1864,
pp. 89-90).

A High Priest in Lalibela believes that as Noah was protected from the destruction of the world by his Ark, likewise, Ethiopia is protected by the Ark of the Covenant (Interview, April 26, 2012). The priests use the Ark of the Covenant interchangeably with the name of the Virgin Mary in their prayer for the Kings. In one of the books it says, “A miracle of Our Lady, the holy twofold Virgin, the Ark of the Holy Spirit, Mary, Mariham, may her intercession be with our king Lebna Dengel” (Haile, 1983, p. 31).

The previous chapter highlighted that the Kebra Nagast presents the existence of the Ark of the Covenant as proof that Ethiopia is a sacred place in the world. Here, it can be observed that it is the church and its schools that made this conception part of the living tradition of the people, and the occasion of *Kidassie* is the most sacred expression of that belief. As provided in the previous chapter, the Kebra Nagast presented

the Ark of the Covenant as the mercy seat that God used to emplace himself in order to create the world. Likewise, Jesus' mother Mary, like the Ark of the Covenant, carried the *word* in her womb to become His mercy seat for the salvation of the world. The Ark of Noah can also be regarded as a place that protected those sheltered in it from the destruction outside. Likewise, it is believed that Ethiopia is a covenant land where the true faith and wisdom is preserved. This teaching expands further in the higher level of study where the training of the *dabtaras* – who are referred to as “the learned Doctors of the church” – is one of its major contributions (S. Pankhurst, 1955, p. 242).

Higher Level Study in the Traditional Education System

Higher level of study in the traditional education system comprises the study of liturgical chant and movement, the study of the art of composing poetry using highly regarded stories and events, and the study of commentaries on various books of religion, law, and time. These three major areas of study are provided under the schools the *Zema Bet*, *Qine Bet*, and *Metsehaf Bet*.

Zema Bet

Zema simply means hymn or song. *Zema Bet* is the House of liturgical chant with the following sub-specialities:

- The study of *Deggwua* (antiphonal hymns for the whole year)
- *Tsome Degwua* (antiphonal songs for Lent)
- *Zimmare and Mawaset* (hymns in honor of the Eucharist and another antiphonary)
- *Aquaquam* (the study of dance with the right use of the prayer stick, sistrum and drum).

In addition to the above sub-specialities, *Kidassie* and *Se'a'ta't* (Holy Mass and Horologium) are regarded as *Zema* studies (Interview, Sept 18, 2011). The *Zema Bet* is the outcome of the development of hymns with a musical writing system that went down through generations of church scholars starting from the time of the great Ethiopian composer Yared

in the 6th century A.D up to the time of Giorgis Zegascha in the middle of the 15th century. There are two important aspects that link the training in the *Zema Bet* with the interpretative perspective on knowledge in traditional education in Ethiopia. The themes of the songs studied in the *Zema Bet* reflect the belief in the Ark of the Covenant and its symbolic meanings. Second, the seasonal arrangements of the songs reflect the cultural and geographical features of the country. This makes the study of *Zema* relevant to the circumstance of life in the country.

Sound, movement, dance, and percussion are the four important study themes of the *Zema Bet*. For example, *Tsoma Deggwua*, the antiphonary for lent, is one of the most admired studies in the *Zema* School. The songs during this long fasting and prayer season are sung with the three major melodies: *ge'ez*, *ezil* and *araray*. The instruments used to sing the songs include the sistrum, the drum and the prayer staff, which are partly related to the Old Testament tradition. *Deggwua* is both a field of study and a text book for the *Zema Bet*. The musical signs written on top of the words in the *Deggwua* book have names such as *merged*, *Nius-merged*, *Abiye-Tsefat* and *Tsefat*. When studied, the songs can be sung with the correct rhythm, melody and harmony (Interview, May 16, 2011). The composer of the songs, Yared, was born in Axum in 505 A.D. He started his career as a deacon, and then became a priest and a treasurer (*gebez*). According to Ethiopian tradition, it is believed that Yared was led to Heaven by three birds to hear the heavenly songs of angels, and seraphim and cherubim (Gebre Giyorgis, 1997). It is believed that he also had obtained inspiration from listening to nature, from the sound of birds, wild beasts and other natural sounds. Inspired by what he saw, he arranged and composed hymns for each season of the year, for summer and winter, and spring and autumn, for festivals and Sabbaths, and for the days of the angels, the prophets, the martyrs and the righteous. His songs were later developed by other Ethiopian hymnists such as Yohannis of Gebela in Wollo and Tewanei of Deq Istifa in Gojam. Additional hymns were later contributed by the Shoan scholar Aba Giorgis Zegasicha, who had literary and composition skills that were parallel to that of Yared's. The tradition of improving the system continued with the expansion of the musical shorthand from two during Yared, to ten later on (Gebre Giyorgis, 1997, p. xviii).

The content of the songs of Yared reflect the significance of Covenant, as symbolized by the Ark and the Virgin Mary. Yared was serving

as a treasurer at the Zion Church in Axum where the original Ark of the Covenant was believed to have been kept. Sylvia Pankhurst observed that Yared “composed a cycle of songs in honour of the ancient church of St. Mary of Zion at Aksum” (1955, p. 239). In his songs, he made several allusions to the Virgin Mary who is symbolized by the Ark of the Covenant. The typical Judo-Christian tradition that involves the Ark of the Covenant and the Virgin Mary as the two Zions that embodied divine providence with special favor and protection to the people of Ethiopia is an important theme of the songs. For example, the following hymn for June 6th, or *Sene* 12th according to the Ethiopian Calendar, the Ark of the Covenant that carried the Laws of God was symbolized with the Virgin Mary who carried in her womb the baby Jesus. The poem and its translation by Lee Ralph goes:

መአዛ አፍሃ ከመኮል፣ከመ ቅርፍተ ሮማን፤

አስተማሰልክዋ፣ሰረገላተ አሚናዳብ።

ከመ ማህፈረ ዳዊት ከሳዳ፤

ወፅላታኒ ዘአራት፣ስብሃት የዓውዳ።

Her mouth is like apple; like the skin of a pomegranate

I compare her to the chariot of Aminadab

Her neck is like the Tower of David

Her tables [are] of the law

Glory surrounds her (2011, p. 225).

The study of the *Deggwua* assists in preserving the notion of a covenant land through uninterrupted reverence to the Ark of the Covenant and the Virgin Mary, Christian salvation symbols that embodied God's protection of Ethiopia. As mentioned previously, it is a mandatory requirement for every Ethiopian Orthodox Church to possess a replica of the Ark of the Covenant - the *tabot*. Placed at the center of the Holy of Holies where no one except priests and the king are allowed to enter, all church services are centered around the *tabot* as the most sacred object in the Ethiopian Orthodox faith. The *dabtaras*, which include graduates of the *Zema Bet*, sing and dance in front of it, the priests prepare the Eucharist on it, and people swear to the truthfulness of their testimony by it. A person who gives his/her word in the name of the *tabot* vouches for its truthfulness. During celebrations the *tabot* is carried by chosen priests.

The scholars of *Zema Bet* and the congregation all accompany it with songs and dances. The colorful expression of honoring the *tabot* can best be observed during epiphany, *timket*, at Lalibela when the singing and the dancing around the *tabot* is observed day and night. During a sermon, a preacher in Lalibela once noted that the two hands of Ethiopia that are stretched out to God, as stated in Psalm 68, Verse 31, are the Ark of the Covenant and the Virgin Mary. This interpretation shows how all ideas are used to affirm the notion of a covenant nation as provided in the previous chapter. The preacher also noted that the rigorous melodious songs of the *Zema Bet* are the sacred offering the nation presents every day before the throne of the Trinity (Interview, March 19, 2011)

The *Deggwua* songs are tailored to change with the weather season of Ethiopia, and with the celebration of festivals and holydays. The *Deggwua* is divided into three major seasonal parts. The first is *Yohannis*, which comprises the collection of songs appropriate for the period between September or *Meskerem*, which is the beginning of Ethiopia's New Year, and the end of November or *Tahisas*. These songs start with the story of John the Disciple, and continue to the New Testament teachings. There are 3572 songs in this section. The second part is called *astemihiro*. These are songs that focus on the teachings of Jesus. They are prepared for the period between December or *Tahisas*, and March or *Megabit*. There are 3474 songs in this section. The third is called *Fasika*, which means Easter, designed for the period between April or *Miaziya*, and September or *Meskerem*. These are a collection of 3462 songs.

The songs resonate with the change in the weather system, with the custom and tradition of the people. They suggest the integration of education with cultural life and natural circumstances. The ensemble and dance *Zema* students and graduates present in front of the *tabot* is often performed with twenty four *dabtaras*, to represent the twenty four heavenly priests that are believed to have been singing in front of God's throne in heaven. Twelve *dabtaras* stand on the left led by *gira geta* (leader of the left), and another twelve on the right led by *kegn geta* (leader of the right). The *merie geta* is the master of the choir. A typical song is performed in four modes of chant and dance. The first is the *kum zema*, a form of hymn sung without the use of instruments. The second is *zima-mee*, a form of hymn with the swinging of the prayer-staff and the body. Third is the *meregid*, a form of singing with more rapid movements, and

with a special use of the sistrum, the drum, and the staff. *Meregid* has subdivisions from one to three levels, depending on the speed of the hymn and the accompanying use of instruments and types of movements. The fourth is *chebchebo* or *tsehif'at*, which is a song liked by youth and ordinary people who participate in the dance with handclapping and the happy chant of *elilita*. *Zema Bet* students attend the above services as they need to observe, practice and sing with other *dabtara*s.

The school of the *Zema Bet* has developed through centers of excellence that are established by famous teachers in various regions of the country. The teachers do not have land or a separate building, or income for their work. Students from all over the country travel to the private homes of these teachers and make their own small hut around the house of the teacher. "Student life is very harsh. The students must find their own food by begging in the village or doing manual labor, and study day and night without exercise books, or pens and pencils. They have to remember everything by heart" (Interview, May 21, 2011). A *dabtara* from Lalibela recounted his memory of hunger and disease in his struggle to learn the *Deggwua*. Leaving his parents at a very young age, and suffering from diseases such as scabies, the only means of survival he had was the name *Kidane Mihret* which means Covenant of Mercy. He had to beg for food using this name in the village where he was repeatedly bitten by dogs. Tibebu recognized the struggle between dogs and traditional school students which are also known as *qolo temari*:

It is astonishing how developed the senses of dogs are when it comes to identifying *qolo temari*. A calm dog lying down on the ground and letting people pass by suddenly bursts off with anger the moment a *qolo temari* abounds the corner (1995, p. 100).

At the end of their training, *Deggwua* students are expected to travel to the few centers of excellence where the most famous scholars reside. In order to verify their knowledge and receive certification, *Zema* students are expected to write their own copy of the entire *Deggwua* book using ink and animal skin. At the ceremony a *Deggwua* graduate is awarded the name *meri-geta*, master of choir, lead scholar, or teacher.

The complete neglect of the traditional school system by post 1974 governments has led to the decline of the *Zema Bet* and other schools

of the traditional education system. Wodajo lamented this decline even before the beginning of the Marxist-Leninist era in 1974, saying, “It is a source of sorrow to see the decline of the ‘Zema Bet’ without any worthwhile substitute in the government schools” (Wodajo, 1959, p. 26). While the *Zema Bet* is known for spiritual melody and dance, another school called the *Qine Bet* is famous for the study of logical reasoning, critical thinking, and the composition of poetry.

Qine Bet

The *Qine Bet* involves the learning of the Ge’ez language and the composition of poetry. The student who studies *Qine* requires a thorough knowledge of the Ge’ez language, a fine understanding of the history of the country, a critical understanding of the Bible and other historical and religious texts (Wagaw, 1990). Although poetry is the main medium through which students present the core message of their ideas, the *Qine Bet* has many more attributes than writing poems. First, it involves the study of Ge’ez. A student who joins *Qine Bet* should come with a good familiarity with Ge’ez. In the *Qine Bet* the student further studies the language in order to express complex concepts using rhyming poems that could be turned into songs. This is important because a *Qine* poem should “be rich in content, revealing a deep knowledge of Bible, of Ethiopian history and of the stories and legends which have gathered during the centuries around the great personalities and events of religious and national tradition” (S. Pankhurst, 1955, p. 245). Secondly, the student needs a good knowledge of the psychological, social and cultural features of the people, their emotional appeals, moral precepts, and aspirations. *Bale Qine*, someone who possesses *Qine*, or can create one, is a person deeply rooted in the cultural life of the people. He can understand the challenges of the people and translate them into timeless songs. The following *Qine* poem was presented in October 12 at the celebration of the Archangel Michael, and it expresses a political message regarding the accumulation of significant wealth by the greedy few at the expense of the death of the majority poor.

Michael you sorrowed for the hungry full forty years,
And, in obedience, you dug Moses’ secret grave;

But the wealthy rejoices when he hears tidings of famine,
And, he digs a grave for his gold, while the body of his fellow man lies
outside (S. Pankhurst, 1955, p. 258).

The training in the art of poetry in *Qine Bet* illustrates the interpretative spirit the Ethiopian education system embodied. What a student has to put in his *Qine* is boundless. In fact, what is admired is the ability to trigger new insights, to elicit a vast array of imagination in order to signify an important point from diverse perspectives. The student should master how to invent a melodious pun out of the deep and wide context of religious and cultural knowledge. The invented poem, to bear credibility and win admiration, should be pregnant with the voice of the voiceless. With a clever use of irony, sarcasm or satire, it should comment on injustice, or express the moral precept of the people. For example, *Asare negus* is a type of *Qine* poem presented in praise of a king. However, clever *Qine* scholars have used it to point out injustice without inducing the wrath of the King. The following poem presented before Emperor Bakuffa points to the injustice of that time:

Impartial justice is practiced, O Bakuffa, in your reign.
While the poor man says,
What we have heard, we have heard;
Let your justice shine like the sun
For all office and honour under the sky
Is for those who have money (S. Pankhurst, 1955, p. 259).

Like in the other traditional schools, student life in *Qine Bet* is massively implicated by the need to find food for one's maintenance. To overcome this challenge, the students have to share what they get from begging (Interview, May 12, 2011). Student who accomplished their *Qine* study would normally travel to certify their knowledge by comparing it with the teaching of a different scholar at one of the famous centers of excellence of *Qine* in the country. Pankhurst mentioned two major centers of excellence: Bethlehem and Wadla (1955). The first focuses on "beauty of melody and rhythm, of phrase and allusion and upon clarity of expression." Wadla focuses on "subtlety of meaning, allusion and construction, combined with adherence to strict grammatical rules" (1955, p. 247).

The poems are often presented with the metaphor of Wax and Gold, *sema ena worq*. While the Wax represents the obvious meaning of the poem, the Gold is the hidden meaning that can only be found with deeper investigation (Levine, 1972). The contribution of *Qine Bet* to the interpretative perspective in Ethiopia is as important as it is a school of critical thinking and innovation. It furnishes fresh insight and dynamism into the various aspects of life and the numerous possibilities of creating fresh perspectives out of old texts.

Metsehaf Bet

Metsehaf Bet, the House of Books, is the highest level of study in Ethiopia's traditional education system. There are four special fields of study under it. The first is *Biluy Kidan*, or the study of the Books of Old Testament, which comprises the first forty-six Books of the Ethiopian Bible. The second branch is *Haddis Kidan*, or the study of the New Testament, which comprises the remaining thirty six books of the Bible. Here, what is studied is not just the text of the books in the Bible but the interpretation of the text as provided by church scholars. During class, students enter the room with bare foot, and sit surrounding the teacher. Then they read a text from the Ge'ez Bible. The teacher first translates the text into Amharic, then provides the application of the text in various life contexts. The emphasis is on how the meaning of the text should be understood in relation to other texts, or in relation to different historical and social circumstances. In this way, "when each sentence or phrase of a text is interpreted, depending on the content, theological, moral and historical questions are raised, discussed, and developed" (Hable-Sellassie & Tamerat, 1970). The teacher jumps from one meaning of the text into another using the word *andimm* which amounts to saying "on the other hand." This method of interpretation is called *andimmta tirguamme*.

Tirgumm could mean interpretation or the interpretation of the interpretation, and *tirguamme* is the process of doing either or both of these. Although it is a dominant methodology in *Metsehaf Bet*, *tirguamme* also occurs in popular culture and other fields (see below). In *Metsehaf Bet* what is usually interpreted thorough *tirguamme* is not just the text but the meaning of the text (Interview, March 15, 2011). There are three types

of doing *tirguamme* or interpreting a text. The first one is *ye'andimta tirguamme*, which is interpretation by enumerating the possible and alternative meanings of the text as exhaustively as possible. The second is *netela tirguame*, which is a singular interpretation of a text that requires no further interpretations. The third one is *yemister tirguamme*, which is the idiomatic interpretation of the text using analogies, heteronyms, and the meaning of other texts. *Yemister tirguamme* focuses on the hidden meaning and significance of the text by taking into account "the general contextual meaning of the whole sentence or paragraph" (Jembere, 1998, p. 35). Often, the meaning of the text is compared with real life circumstances, or with the meanings of other texts to avoid contradiction in the overall understanding of a particular concept.

Excessive use of memory is the biggest challenge that students face in *Metshaf Bet* (Interview, Sept 18, 2011). Traditionally, lack of written materials has been the main reason for this. However, there is also the desire to maintain tradition, and to curb the infiltration of other religious views and ideologies (Interview, March 15, 2011). This is especially important given controversies over religious matters fissured the unity of church and state in the past (Tamrat, 1993). In the previous chapter, I have shown that, based on the Kebra Nagast, Ethiopians viewed their country as a covenant land, and an island of Christianity. Historically, this belief enabled the country to remain as a predominantly Christian nation although it was surrounded by Muslim countries. Although external political and economic relations were severed, religious inspiration continued to stir cultural dynamism, one influencing the other, ultimately evolving into an indigenous Christianity that blended Judaic, Syriac, Byzantine, Arabic and Greek texts with indigenous beliefs and values. *Metsehaf Bet* played a key role in this process by weaving the various biblical texts with the cultural, historical and traditional life in the nation. Students and scholars alike did this by using metaphors, proverbs, and other attributes of culture to make sense of religious texts and vice versa. Commenting on the process of education in *Metsehaf Bet*, Hable-Selassie and Tamerat emphasized that,

Historical interpretations are mixed with legendary tales and special natural events, all considered to be miracles, and even concrete phenomena are given symbolical meanings. The expressions are vividly illustrated

with parables, analogies, proverbs, and popular wisdom. Parallels are quoted from the history of the country while interpreting the passage on the Holy Land. Generally, the approach to reality is well mixed with mythical attitudes (1970).

The two other branches of the *Metshaf Bet* are called *Liqawunit* and *Menekosat*. *Liqawunit* includes the study of the writings of church fathers, the study of ecclesiastical and civil law, and the study of the computation of time and calendar under the name *Bahire Hasab*. In the school of *Liqawunit*, *Fetha Nagast* or the Judgment of Kings is a vital source of the study of law (Jembere, 1998). Initially, the book was drawn from various apostolic canons and laws. Budge thinks that it was translated with “an Ethiopian flavour” from an Arabic text by a priest called Abraham (1928, p. 568). The *Fitha Nagast*, along with the entire Ethiopian customary laws, was dismissed from public use through the 1930 Penal Code and the 1960 Civil Code of Ethiopia (Jembere, 1998), as will be discussed in Chapter 4. *Menekosat* or the School of Monasticism is the study of monastic literature such as Rules of Pachominus, *Aregawi-Menfesawi* or Spiritual Precepts, *Lidete-Menekosat* or genealogy of monks and others (Wagaw, 1990, p. 39).

The traditional education system presented so far is not an exhaustive presentation of the entire system. Yet, it is indicative of the indigenous knowledge that has been preserved in a system of education for centuries. It cements the spirit of connection between the present and the future generations. In this regard, it would have been instructive for Ethiopian leaders to give heed to Isaac’s recommendation:

If Ethiopian self-understanding and national consciousness are to remain, a major portion of the subjects of traditional learning in the three levels of study must be retained. Much broader contact between the university and the church, in particular between its scholars, will be needed (1971, p. 1).

However, as will be demonstrated later in this book, Ethiopian elites ignored such recommendations from prominent figures and traditional elders, and adopted a new system that triumphs by destroying rather than preserving tradition.

The Legacy of Interpretative Tradition

This section will focus on Ethiopia's tradition of knowledge production through novelty of interpretation of local and the synthesis of external sources. The Ethiopian indigenous methodology, *Tirguamme*, provides a valuable insight for the production of relevant knowledge. *Tirguamme ትርጓሜ* is simply the art of giving meaning to reality or text. It is a process that searches for meaning by focusing on the multiplicity, intention, irony and beauty of a given text. As a cultural practice, *tirguaamme* occurs in the form of popular wisdom such as Wax and Gold (ሰም እና ወርቅ), allegorical puzzle games (እንቁጥልሽ - ምን አውቅልሽ), the art of judicial debating (እሰጥ ፡ ግገባ), storytelling (ተረት ተረት) and so on. In the traditional education system, *tirguaamme* is a process of inquiry into the hidden essence of a text or reality based on the principle of ንባብ ፡ ይቀትል ፡ ወትርጓሜ ፡ የሃዩ ። which literally means, *text kills; but meaning heals*. It is applied in three interrelated fields of knowledge. First, *tirguaamme* appears as the study of the interpretation of texts in *Metsehaf Bet* and serves as a context for producing witty, satirical and complex poems in *Qine Bet* (see above). In order to produce a glorious poem that can be celebrated with a chant of admiration, ይበል!, by the audience, the student needs to understand the literal meaning of the raw text (የጥፊ፡ትርጉም), its multiple meanings (የሚ ስጥር፡ትርጓሜ) and its idiomatic meaning (የሚስጥር፡ትርጓሜ), all studied in the House of Books. Second, *tirguaamme* is also a process of incorporating foreign texts into the knowledge base, based on the principle of *creative incorporation*. This principle is intended to make knowledge relevant to the notion of covenant and place.

Traditional education in Ethiopia had the purpose of maintaining the belief in the providential destiny of Ethiopia as a beloved nation of God. To this end, Ethiopian scholars were determined to introduce, translate, or invent various texts from internal and international sources. In the process of importing knowledge from sources outside the country, “the emphasis had always been on incorporating the imported materials into Ethiopian realities as perceived and understood by the scholars and scribes of the time” (Wagaw, 1990, pp. 47-48). In the process of doing this, Ethiopia's traditional scholars built a tradition of knowledge that served as a context for the development of further knowledge using the church as the center of intellectual life. Ullendorff noted that the

Ethiopian church tradition served as “a filter through which every facet of thought, old or new, had to pass to be accepted, rejected, or modified. How much was suppressed, and lost in this process can never be known” (1965, p. 139). Ullendorff’s concern here appears to be on the originality of knowledge, on the ideas that were lost or changed in the process of passing through the interpretative tradition of the Ethiopian church. What is neglected in this perspective, however, is an inquiry into the outcome of the creative blending between the Ethiopian tradition and the imported ideas, the field of knowledge that emerges out of the process of adapting “alien” ideas to a dynamic context. It is this field of knowledge which was dismissed as non-existent through the western model of education.

What drives the process of adapting knowledge was the search for wisdom in meaning. From the traditional point of view, meaning, which is “the essence of the text,” is regarded as God’s idea that can be reached through the guidance of the Spirit of God (Interview, March 19, 2011). Persons who interpreted texts needed divine support with appropriate qualification to reveal the meaning behind the text, or to interpret it. Involving God in the process of interpretation opened a greater interest in ethical inquiry and fields of knowledge open to the public. Guided by the conception of wisdom as discernment and humility, the notion of intellectual property did not exist. Even today this practice is more or less intact. A *dabtara* described his long years of intellectual journey by saying how God was the beginner and the finisher of his journey (Interview, March 15, 2011). Most of the church authors were monks who lived in monasteries which were famous centers for intellectual excellence. Based on the aforementioned maxim “text kills; but meaning heals,” they carefully rewrote the various texts they had obtained from outside the country (Interview, March 19, 2011). In the process, they enriched the scope of meaning and significance of the original texts. The detailed commentaries they wrote on the original texts, including the Bible, show the significance of interpretation over translation. The argument advanced here is that, in Ethiopia, before the beginning of the modern period, relevance preceded originality. In this section, I will present a brief summary of the Ethiopian interpretative literary heritage, followed by a more detailed discussion of five works that belong to the traditional intellectual legacy of the country.

Literary Tradition

Ethiopia is often regarded as “the birth place of modern thought in Africa” (Makumba, 2007, p. 84) not only for the existence of written literature, but because of a culture that saw learning and intellectual pursuit as great personal qualities. Intellectual pursuit, which was to be achieved through the interpretation of life using religious texts and vice versa, was an important aspect of Ethiopian thought (Sumner, 2005). Isaac presented a good summary of the body of writing and literature that developed in the Ethiopian Orthodox church (Ephraim Isaac, 2013a, pp. 231-276). The Bible is the primary religious text, translated first from Greek (Septuagint) (Budge, 1928, p. 565). The Ethiopian Bible contains 81 books, 46 of which belong to the Old Testament and 35 to the New Testament. According to Budge, some of the translated materials manifest clear differences from their originals. For example, the arrangement of the Book of Ezra is unique, and the Books of Maccabees is “entirely different from those found in our Bible” (1928, p. 505). The Book of Enoch and the Book of Jubilees are preserved only in Ge’ez in Ethiopia since the original texts have perished (Ephraim Isaac, 2013a, p. 235). Isaac confirmed that the Ethiopian version is the oldest and most reliable manuscript of all Enoch texts (1983). Translated around the middle of the 4th century into Ge’ez, the book became the most widely translated and highly influential book of all Old Testament books over the New Testament (Charles, 1912). In addition to the Bible, various books, such as *kerilos* – the teaching of Cyril, *Serate Paqumis* or ascetic rules – and *physiologos* or *fisalgwos* – a book on animals and plants of ancient Greek – were translated into Ge’ez before the 7th Century. The main text of Ethiopia’s national epic, *Kebra Nagast*, was part of the literary fruits of the 13th century. In the 13th century, detailed chronicles of Ethiopian kings appeared. These chronicles have been translated into Latin, French, Portuguese, German, English, Russian and more (Budge, 1928). However, as will be shown in later chapters, these materials are excluded as sources for the teaching of Ethiopian history in the modern period.

Universal history was an important field in traditional Ethiopian education. Summary of General History from Creation to 640 A.D., and The Universal History of Al-Makin (1213-1234), History of Alexander the Great, and the Book of *Abushakir* – a book of chronology

with 59 chapters – are typical examples in this field. There were books in ecclesiastical and Civil Law that developed from Canons of the Apostles and the *Didascalia*, there were Apocriphical works, commentaries, theological books, hymn books, books on calendars and astronomy, biographical works, books on grammar and many more. Translated from Hebraic sources, the Sinodos “Synodicon,” Didssqthja “Didascalia of the Apostles” and *Metsehafe Kidan* “Testament of Our Lord” were designed to blend the Old Testament with the New Testament tradition (Haile, 1988, p. 233).

No exhaustive list of the books is known to have existed, nor is it known how many books were translated into Amharic for the use of ordinary Ethiopians. Especially since the 19th century, Ethiopia has lost immeasurable intellectual resources that had been accumulated during several centuries. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church has saved a considerable amount of literature for its own spiritual purposes but other sources of knowledge that govern secular affairs have been ignored or destroyed. As will be shown in the following chapters, the neglect of the intellectual heritage of the nation has led to the progressive abandonment of the internal worldview that Ethiopian pupils could have used to interpret knowledge. The following short commentary on five works illustrates the epistemological tradition that the Ethiopian intellectual heritage holds as a source of knowledge for education.

Fisalgwos

The book of Fisalgwos is one of the earliest texts incorporated from Greek into Ge’ez, probably around the 5th Century (Sumner, 2005). The book starts “ድርሳን ዘብፁዕ ፊሳልግስ ዘደረሰ በእንተ ኣራዊት ወእለዋፍ ...” which means “this is a book written by holy Fisalgwos about wild animals and birds”. Although the original Greek text was written in a pagan setting, Fisalgwos was described as *bitsu*, which means a holy person according to the Ethiopian epistemological tradition that presents the author as a reveler of divine knowledge. The book is an encyclopedia of 48 chapters on real and imaginary animals. Sumner believed that the particular importance of Fislagwos is “the light it sheds on the Ethiopian medieval period, its rich symbolism and its rich set of moral values” (2005, p. 329). The book is important for being the earliest text that set a unique style

of producing local knowledge by incorporating foreign texts, thereby explaining domestic realities with new insights. Sumner explained this methodology as follows:

The author follows these sources step by step; but when the opportunity of adaptation to his allegories and to his religious speculations is suggested, he does not hesitate to elaborate them without scruple, abridging them, amplifying them, transforming them radically – a pattern of development and adaptation from original sources which will flourish in Ethiopia in the XVI century with the Book of the Philosophers and the Life and Maxims of Skendes (2005, p. 217).

The interpretative model aimed at reconciling two contrary interests. On the one hand, the time was a period when Greek philosophy spread throughout the Mediterranean and West Asian countries, following the conquest of Alexander the Great. On the other hand, it was also a time when Hellenistic Christianity was gaining momentum in the world (McLean, 2002). These two factors – universal philosophy and universal religion – were considered as centers of civilization that started to pull the process of “global integration” towards Europe. Hence, Ethiopians had to respond to the demand of this “global” pull towards “integration” by interpreting *Fisalgwos*, one of the most fashionable books of the period. Secondly, in Ethiopia, Christianity had already been indigenized with a national ideology that placed Ethiopia at the center of the world. Hence, there was the desire not just to preserve what existed but also to use the new insight to affirm and to exemplify the internal conviction about the centrality of Ethiopia. It is the wisdom of reconciling these two interests that the Ethiopian translator of the *Fisalgwos* was concerned with: to not be isolated from the world without losing one’s identity and to relate to the wider world while still grounding oneself on a stable national center.

Metsehafe Felasfa Tebiban, The Book of the Wise Philosophers

Metsehafe felasfa tebiban, also known as *angara falasfa* or The Book of the Wise Philosophers, is a philosophical text that demonstrates the Ethiopian knowledge tradition that developed through interaction with ancient civilizations. It is believed that the text was incorporated into Ge’ez

between 1510 and 1522. Sumner believes that the Ge'ez text was translated from an Arabic text which in turn was a translation of a lost Greek original (1976). Budge mentions some of the names of the philosophers mentioned in the book as "Alexander, Aristotle, Democritus, Diogenes, Galan, Heraclius, Hermes, Hippocrates...Plato, Porphyry, Ptolemy, Pythagoras, Sextus, Simonides, Socrates, Themistius, fathers of the Church like Basil and Gregory" (1928, p. 218). The translation of the Book of the Philosophers according to Sumner was "the return of African philosophy to its home base" (2005, p. 219). The ideas of the various Greek philosophers were reconceptualized and incorporated into the Ethiopian knowledge tradition to provide a philosophical discourse that strengthened morality and spiritual life.

The delivery of the content of the book was organized in a way a parent, teacher or an elder would advise a child, calling him/her "*lijie*" which means, "my son/daughter." The contents are full of memorable maxims, parables and allegories, prepared in carefully crafted sentences for oral instruction. Reading the book projects a mental setting where a caring, wise, and affectionate teacher explains the most important messages of life and experience to their student. This method of instruction is popular in Africa and is often described as sage philosophy or philosophical sagacity (Oruka, 1990). Makumba argued that the *Metsehafe Falasfa Tebiban* is similar to Oruka's notion of "folk sagacity" that expresses African philosophical wisdom (Makumba, 2007, p. 84). The sayings are partly referenced to great philosophers of Greek, and to Roman figures as well as to Biblical figures, often with little regard to accuracy. Parts of the text are presented either without reference to any person or with the phrase "it was said." The themes raised in the book are consistent with the concept of wisdom presented in the Kebra Nagast. Sumner described how wisdom was presented in two senses in the book:

Philosophy is here understood in a wider sense as 'wisdom.' Taken subjectively in the person who possesses it, wisdom includes the ability, the inclination and the steady purpose of putting knowledge to good use. Taking the term 'wisdom' in an objective sense and regarding it in a most general way, it is the sum total of the things worth knowing and working for (1998, p. 329).

This understanding of wisdom as “putting knowledge to good use” or as “the sum total of the things worth knowing and working for” illustrates the ethical and axiological aspect of knowledge in the Ethiopian tradition. Knowledgeable persons are regarded “wise” if they are able to renounce the riches of the world in favor of wisdom, which includes the practice of the good and the virtuous, *paideia*, even when what is considered good is in conflict with self-interest.

Zena Skendes Tebib, The Life and Maxim of Skendes

The Life and Maxim of Skendes is what Sumner called “an Ethiopian version of the Oedipus story” (1981, p. 330). According to Sumner, the text of Skendes has five versions: two western, two Eastern and one African (1981). The western versions are Greek and Latin; the Eastern are Syriac and Arabic; and the African is Ge’ez. These versions differ in both content and purpose. For instance, the Ethiopian text was entirely Christian, while the Greek text of Oedipus was pagan, and the Arabic was neither pagan nor Christian. The Ethiopian translators introduced minor and significant changes in the story and ideas contained in the original text. For instance, Skendes (the Ethiopian version) grew up and studied in Athens and Bertus, but Oedipus (the Greek version) in Corinth. Skendes disguised himself as a stranger and sleeps with his mother, but Oedipus meets his father and kills him and then marries and sleeps with his mother. In both stories, the mother hangs herself. After the death of his mother, Skendes lives the rest of his days in silence and wrote 153 maxims and responses to ethical questions that were presented to him by King Andryanos. However, Oedipus famously gouges out his eyes and disappears inexplicably.

The shocking story of Oedipus is very well known throughout the world, unlike the Ethiopian story of Skendes. Famous stories, such as Oedipus, often serve as important backgrounds in the construction of new theories. For instance, Sigmund Freud used the Oedipus story to suggest that the earliest sexual attraction of a boy is towards his mother, which results in an unconscious desire to kill his father: “King Oedipus, who slew his father Laius and married his mother Jocasta, merely shows us the fulfilment of our own childhood wishes” (2010, p. 280). He coined the term “Oedipus Complex” to present a common psychological condition that occurs at the phallic stage of human development.

The comparison between Freud's approach and the Ethiopian interpretation suggests an important insight into the diversity of epistemological traditions between the West and Ethiopia. Freud uses the shocking and widely known story of Oedipus to suggest that "all men are incestuous and parricides in the depth of their psyche" (Sumner, 1981, p. 442). However, the Ethiopian interpretation bends the story towards the country's tradition of searching for wisdom. Skendes deliberately planned to seduce his mother to disprove the teaching of philosophers that said "all women are prostitutes." That means, the Ethiopian translator incorporated the Greek story of Oedipus by recreating him as Skendes, a Christian adult man who believed that "the veracity of a statement is in need of a testing, that is of an experimentation" (1981, p. 28). According to the Ethiopian translator, the motive of the main character Skendes was sapiential. Like the Queen of Sheba before him and the great philosopher Zara Yacob after him, the author saw wisdom as "light" of the soul, and of reason (Sumner, 1981, p. 54 and 446).

The two interpretations suggest the epistemological tradition of their authors. The modern reader of Oedipus may follow Freud's interpretation and discover the master of accomplishment and the rebel of parental tyranny, or the "solar hero who murders his procreator, the darkness; shares his couch with the mother, the gloaming, from whose lap the dawn, he has been born, and dies blinded, as the setting sun" (Rank, Richter, & Lieberman, 2004, p. 10). The Ethiopian reader of *Zena Skendes*, on the other hand, could discover the wise Skendes who took silence, humility, and repentance as the great qualities of life. The Ethiopian translator uses the story of Skendes to advise the powerful: "O King, you are a man just as I am. You depend upon all kinds of appetites just like irrational animals; ... O Andryanos, be careful and know ... you too have beasts in your houses, that pursue corruption from passion" (Sumner, 1981, p. 35).

The story of Skendes illustrates the importance of interpretation for the development of multiple knowledge traditions. In Ethiopia, the story of Skendes was presented to solidify a person's determination to endure ascetic life. The translator may have had this in mind in the admonishing of women as excessively lecherous, reflecting possible attitudes towards women at the time (Sumner, 1981, pp. 44-45). However, this injudicious approach implies that interpretations are not necessarily innocent as they require careful re-examination, as argued in the philosophy of

Zara Yacob. The Book of Skendes represents a “translation activity that flourished during the whole span of Ethiopic thought” (1981, p. 437). The following quote summarizes the traditional Ethiopian methodology of creative incorporation as exemplified by the Book of Skendes:

A careful comparison between the Ethiopic and the Arabic texts shows that the Ethiopian translator very often departs from the Arabic original. He both subtracts and adds...The Ethiopian translator is clearly distinguishable as a deeply thinking person with a very sensitive power of perception. He is a man for whom reflection is a habit. He places himself, as it were, inside the characters he introduces; he feels with them; he understands clearly and thoroughly their sorrows and their joys. Thanks to such a fine portraying of moods and temperaments, the story is ethically deepened, its rather crude and shocking content is ennobled and made more acceptable so that there can be no doubt: the Secundus story as it is conveyed in Ethiopic is the most perfect, the most morally exalted and the most chastened of all the preserved Secundus accounts (Sumner, 1981, pp. 437-438).

This legacy of knowledge production was totally dismissed by modern Ethiopian elites who chose not to interpret or incorporate but imitate western texts with complete disregard to the Ethiopian context, as will be shown in the forthcoming chapters.

The Ethiopic Versions of the Books of Alexander the Great

Further aspects of the interpretative approach to knowledge production can be seen in a series of “translated” books regarding the story of Alexander the Great. The available Ethiopic versions of the story are contained in six books, and, according to Sylvia Pankhurst, can be regarded as “original” works (1955, p. 218). Although the books are not dated, it is estimated that they were written in Ethiopia in the thirteenth century. The author/s did not translate the story literally. Instead, they transformed the story of Alexander to fit the Ethiopian Judo-Christian precepts and values. What appears to be governing their work was adherence not to the authenticity of the original text but to the centrality of the context. Hence, fundamental changes have been introduced. In the words of Pankhurst, “Alexander’s victory in the chariot races described in

the Greek version of the Pseudo-Callisthenes is discarded. Greek gods are transformed into Old Testament prophets. Pagan kings and queens express Christian sentiments” (1955, p. 29).

The book exemplifies wisdom as the cardinal virtue of kings, a theme repeatedly emphasized in the *Kebra Nagast*. Alexander was instructed to write “a book of wisdom” where he gave advice about parents’ responsibilities to educate their children, kings and governors responsibilities “not to pervert justice, nor to prosecute the poor...but to give of their possessions to the needy and to the stranger” (S. Pankhurst, 1955, p. 229). The Ethiopian Ge’ez romance of Alexander as a pious man may be the reflection of the reign of Zagwe emperors, especially that of King Lalibela who was both a king and a priest around the same time that the books were written.

By adopting and incorporating the knowledge of their contemporaries, Ethiopian traditional scholars utilized tradition as an engine of progress. The desire to maintain tradition did not entail isolation from the external world. Tradition involved the process of analyzing and interpreting knowledge from outside, then producing a knowledge that was better served to the context. As Sumner concluded: “Ethiopians never translate literally...they add, subtract, and modify...a foreign work becomes indigenous not through originality of invention but originality of style” (1980, p. 396).

Critical Philosophy: Hateta Ze Zara Yacob

The philosophy of the 17th Century Ethiopian philosopher Zara Yacob disproves the claim that rationalism and empiricism is the tradition of western philosophy alone. Zara Yacob was a contemporary of Rene Descartes in Europe. Sumner conducted a full investigation of the text of Zara Yacob and his disciple Walda Hiwot to prove that “modern philosophy began in Ethiopia at the same time as in England and France” (1976, p. 275).

The philosophy of Zara Yacob can be regarded as a critical inquiry that belonged to the tradition of the *Qine Bet* and the *Metsehaf Bet*. It can also be seen in light of the Ethiopian tradition of learning as the search for wisdom, whereby the student endures suffering and practices humility in search of wisdom. Zara Yacob was a well-known teacher of the House of Books in Axum at a time when King Susenyos was converted

into Catholicism and those who did not accept the new religion were prosecuted. During his four years of study in the *Qine Bet* and ten years of study in the *Metsehaf Bet*, Zara Yacob learned the interpretation of truth based on various religious books. He fled prosecution and spent two years in a cave where he meditated on various philosophical questions while praying using the Book of Psalms in the tradition of the Orthodox Church.

Sumner identified three fundamental points in the philosophy of Zara Yacob. These include the need of critical examination of all faiths and customs, the consideration of reason as “a light” that leads us to truth, and the goodness of nature (Sumner, 2004, p. 176). For Zara Yacob, the controversy regarding truth among Orthodox, Catholic, Islamic and Jewish followers shows that these institutions and other people cannot become real sources of truth. His belief in the existence of God as a morally just being who expresses love, justice, goodness in all created things, and who shares his intelligence to human beings, is a critical point. Thus, the proper use of human intelligence is the only path to truth. He wrote, “if it is truth that we want, let us seek it with our reason which God has given us so that with it we may see that which is needed for us” (Sumner, 1976, p. 13). This is because, “we cannot ... reach truth through the doctrine of men, for all men are liars” (1976, p. 13). There is no doubt that Zara Yacob is committed to human reason above any religious teaching. He rejected the Bible or the Quran or any other text as a final word on truth. However, it is important to consider whether this rejection amounts to a total break with tradition or a process that transforms tradition.

Western Enlightenment is often regarded as a break from tradition. Scholars associate progress and modernization with the abandonment of tradition. Instead of studying the histories and literatures of the “fathers,” Emerson wrote, “why should not we also enjoy original relation to the universe? Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs?” (2001, p. 27). This view of Enlightenment is often accepted by African scholars who hold essentialist views of tradition and regard western rationalism as the condition of modernization. The philosophy of Zara Yacob suggests that the neutrality of reason from tradition could be doubted by considering the close relationship one’s experience has with their ability to reason. The use of reason, as presented by Zara

Yacob, is an ongoing inquiry to improve what one perceives or gains from tradition. Whether rejected or accepted, a proper knowledge of existing traditions is an essential starting point of inquiry. Zara Yacob was educated in the traditional education system and developed a deep awareness of the shortcomings and contradictions of various truth claims. Although he understands the traditional approach to the questions he was asking, he kept inquiring, "If God is the guardian of men, how is it that their nature is this deeply corrupted?" "How does God know? Is there anyone in heaven who knows? Or if there is anyone who knows why does he remain silent on men's depravity while they corrupt his name and act with iniquity in his holy name?" This inquiry does not take place in a *tabula rasa* mind; nor was there any need for a total departure from tradition. Zara Yacob had been committed to the prayer of the faithful, constantly asking God to make him intelligent. Although Zara Yacob refused to call himself a follower of a particular religion, the knowledge that served him as a context and source for critical inquiry came from tradition. By challenging what many took for granted, he did not reject the knowledge he acquired from tradition; rather, he transformed it. Sumner noted that, "from an intellectual viewpoint, Zera Yacob was a dove, free and independent, as he soared over the jagged divisions of the earth with its mountains and chasms huddled one against the other" (2004, p. 195). However, one should also remember how the relationship between this "free and independent" mind and the intellectual context in which it operated was established and mediated. Tradition furnishes the breadth of memory and the stretch of imagination to a scholarly personality. Zara Yacob's *batata* suggests that traditional knowledge without critical reflection is static, and critical reflection without traditional knowledge is erratic. This methodological approach provides an interesting insight into the interpretative model of education that I have sketched so far. What has been provided so far under the intellectual legacy of Ethiopia is the wealth of knowledge accumulated from the traditional education system in which Zara Yacob was an accomplished scholar. Thus, Zara Yacob's *batata* should be considered not as a negation of Ethiopia's cultural belief systems, but as a contribution to it (T. Asfaw, 2004).

In the process of accumulating the wealth of knowledge from various sources such as Fisalgwos, Oedipus or Skendes, Alexander the Great and so on, Ethiopia's traditional scholars used what Sumner called "creative

incorporation,” the process of subjecting the imported knowledge to domestic beliefs, values and interests (1998, p. 443). What has been brought from outside was incorporated into the inside, not the other way around. Zara Yacob appeared to have gone even further by trying to avoid the prioritization of the inside over the outside; by putting all beliefs, including his own, under the critical, rational, intellectual investigation of the human mind. But, it should be noted that the critical mind is created and developed through dialogue with the context; it is the constant *dialogue* with the context that produces knowledge. Thus, Zara Yacob’s *batata* is not a total negation of traditional or cultural experience. It is an affirmation of faith and of culture by the use of reason- a philosophical method for the possible fashioning of human experience through the practice of critical inquiry.

Conclusion

This chapter presented an important aspect of Ethiopia’s traditional legacy that could have been used as a source of knowledge for education today. I focused on two important processes involving in the traditional education system. The first one is the various levels of schooling or “Houses” made available through the traditional system. The existence of such a sophisticated indigenous system provides a background and context for intergenerational transmission of wisdom and values. It promoted the key axiological imperatives – the notion of covenant, wisdom, service, and center – that were upheld in the long political and social history of the country. For instance, the notion of covenant presented in the previous chapter, is extended here to cover the personal conviction of the student to pursue wisdom. Believing that students are chosen by the will of God for a destiny of service, they endure a harsh living condition in search for wisdom. The free service they give to the people at church and the daily leftovers they would gather from the public to sustain themselves at school rooted them in the culture of the people. In this respect, the Ethiopian Orthodox church provided a fertile intellectual context for modern ideas to flourish (Ephraim Isaac, 2013a).

The second important point is the legacy of knowledge production in Ethiopia. This methodological insight is fundamentally important to the

African continent as it counters arguments that present Africa as without any worthwhile knowledge traditions. In Ethiopia, ideas and texts were gathered from a range of sources, including non-Christian materials, but they were molded and remade to serve the national precepts and values at home. This process is known as *tirguamme*, a method of interpretation studied at the higher level of education, and employed by Ethiopian scholars who incorporated books from Hebraic, Greek, and Arabic originals. The principle of “*nibab yiqetil wotirguamme yehayou*” – “text kills; but meaning heals” – means that any text, irrespective of its source, is considered raw and is thus in need of interpretation. Consequently, even the Bible had to be translated into the local context and its commentaries studied by heart in the *Metsehaf Bet*. The interpreted texts by virtue of interpretation should be understood as original works, or contributions to knowledge. The significance of the *hatata* of Zara Yacob is not due to its similarity or difference with Descartes but because it is the fruit of the *Qine Bet* and the *Metsehaf Bet*; it exemplifies the dynamism and hope the interpretative spirit of the traditional system holds for the future.

Currently, Ethiopian church scholars still express national sentiments, and uphold the interpretative perspectives discussed in this and the previous chapter. However, since the middle of the 20th century, there is a marked decline in this respect. Largely, Ethiopian governments since then, and to some extent the Orthodox Church Administration itself, advocated alien ideologies that undermined the principles of the Kebra Nagast and the interpretative legacy of the traditional education system. My observations in this chapter should not be seen as some kind of proposal that the modern education system should be replaced by the traditional school system; rather, I am arguing that relevant education must consider the intellectual legacy of the country if it is to be relevant to the people. I am also not promoting a form of uncritical nostalgia with the past. Instead, I am arguing that Ethiopia has a rich knowledge tradition with some elements that could enrich the education and life of the country. In a more general sense, the central argument being advanced throughout this chapter and book is that people should not be disconnected from their traditional experiences because their experiences embody the most important resources for their education. Only in this way, education becomes an internally driven and dynamic cultural experience.



The Rise of Epistemic Violence Against Traditions

Introduction

The chief characteristic of modernization has always been its strong association with western experience. Three successive stages can be identified in the history of the introduction of western knowledge which influenced (and continues to influence) how modernization manifests in Africa. The first one was the stage of optimism where the soft and friendly gesture of western missionaries and explorers was welcomed as a sign of a “benevolent civilizer.” David Livingston, Henry Salt and many other explorers were welcomed in this spirit of optimism. The second was the stage of frustration that occurred with the realization that the “benevolent civilizer” was a powerful master that enforced only its own interests and ideas through force or coercion. In Africa, the most important realization of this process occurred through colonialism, a system of violence characterized by punitive raids, dispossession of lands, invalidation of local traditions and a legacy that reproduces violence in the postcolonial period. In the third stage, the frustration led to the generation of various discourses and the implementation of practices that eventually tamed the frustration into submission. Mudimbe argues that the colonizing structure dominated not just the physical landscape but most importantly, the mental spaces and the imagination of the people (1988). Colonialism precipitated the impossibility to imagine modernization without westernization.

The Ethiopian experience of modernization differs from the rest of Africa, given that it was the only African country never to be colonized, but remarkably it is still heavily influenced by western epistemology. Ethiopia was initially defiant of the powerful colonial master, both epistemologically and militarily. Its indigenous worldview helped mobilize its people from the vast and rugged plateau land of Abyssinia to stand in unison and defeat the Italian colonial attempt at the Battle of Adwa in 1896. However, like many other African countries, eventually, Ethiopia fell victim of Eurocentrism that presents modernization as synonymous with westernization. The process of this transition involves two types of violence: epistemic violence against traditions and physical violence to quell dissent. Epistemic violence involves the suppression of local worldviews, customs, authorities and practices by a new system of knowledge that is imposed or imitated from an alien source. An alien epistemology becomes violent when it creates a strong association with power and privilege, with the consequence of objectifying and suppressing local knowledges. This chapter examines Ethiopia's transition from a monarchical system based on the notion of covenant and wisdom to a country ruled by elitist western institutions and imitated concepts through a critical analysis of the development of western education and legal systems in the country. It begins by identifying a critical turning point towards westernization in the history of the country.

The Rise of Tewodros: 'It is possible to make everything in Habesha'

In Ethiopia, the period between 1800 and 1855 is called Zammana Masafint. The power of the central state was weakened as the country was divided among regional lords who battled to control the center by putting the Emperor under their influence. The end of this era of unrest was foretold by the ancient Ethiopian book of prophesy called *Fikare Eyesus*. The book can be seen as an attempt to provide guidance and hope to the people during a time of turbulence. It is a text that comes from the tradition of creative incorporation. Prophecies about the coming of evil times were selected from various spiritual texts and were used to warn the people to remain faithful as a just king by the name Tewodros would

come to protect the needy and render justice. According to Wolde-Aregay, Zemmana Masafint and the prophesy in *Fikare Eyesus* were the two most important factors that facilitated the rise of Kassa Hailu as Tewodros II, King of Kings of Ethiopia (1990). Kassa was born from a royal father and a poor *kosso* (medicinal plant) vending mother. He started as a low ranking governor at a small province called *quara*. His chronicler Aleka Zeneb described him as a pious man with a burning passion for justice. His ambition was to restore the glory of Ethiopia as a covenant land and to free Jerusalem from the hands of the Turks. He mobilized a strong army that defeated the strongest powers of the Zemmana Masafint.

In 1861, Tewodros II decided to experiment with the manufacturing of cannons in Ethiopia. He organized a team of workers that included Jaquin, a French metal-caster living in Ethiopia who volunteered to make a mortar, local artisans and European missionaries. A blast furnace was built and traditional bellows installed to melt the iron. At the first attempt, the furnace melted before the iron reached the melting point. Frustrated by the failed attempt, Jaquin left the team but the King remained determined to advance the project using the missionaries and local artisans as part of the team. After repeated attempts and innumerable failures, a small sized cannon was manufactured. As reported by one of the missionaries, Tewodros declared, "Now I am convinced that it is possible to make everything in *Habesha* [Ethiopia]. Now the art has been discovered; God at last has revealed Himself. Praise and thanks be to Him for it" (qtd. in R. Pankhurst, 1990b, p. 129). The manufacturing of cannons using traditional equipment signified the birth of a new hope for an internally driven progress that creatively incorporated local and external knowledge and skill.

The facility used to manufacture the cannon was the result of traditional skills. Ethiopians knew how to melt iron and make spears, plowshares, knives and other tools. This innovative transformation of the equipment of Ethiopian traditional artisans into a gun-making factory was recorded by the British traveler Henry Dufton:

The metal was melted in some thirty crucibles, on fires in the ground, blown by hand-bellows of the most primitive description – consisting of a leather bag, the mouth of which is opened on being drawn up for

the receipt of air, and closed and when the air is to be driven by pressure through the clay tube conducting to the fire (qtd. in R. Pankhurst, 1990b, p. 130).

The description fits the most common design of traditional iron-melting practices in the country. Dufton wrote, "Every encouragement is given by the king to his people in their endeavors to perfect themselves in the manufacture of these implements, for he is fully aware that this is the best way to secure his independence of other nations" (qtd. in 1990b, p. 130). The production of weapons continued without the support of the British whom Tewodros first saw as an ally but later as enemy. By 1868, when the British stormed Tewodros' fortress at Meqdalla and he committed suicide to avoid capture, it was discovered that "the Ethiopian ruler had 24 brass cannons, four iron cannons and nine brass mortars, the latter all made in Ethiopia some with neat inscriptions in Amharic" (1990b, p. 131).

The industrial initiatives pursued by Tewodros were not limited to the making of cannons. There were also road and vehicle construction, and boat building efforts. The road construction was designed to link the towns of Gondar, Gojjam and Meqdalla. According to a British eyewitness "[the] craftsmen, with Tewodros' approval, at about this time also constructed a carriage to travel on these roads, one of the first such vehicles ever seen in the land" (1990b, p. 134). Henry Blanc, one of the British missionaries who was present at the construction work, observed that:

From early dawn until late at night Theodore was himself at work; with his own hands he removed stones, leveled the ground, or helped to fill up small ravines. No one could leave as long as he was there himself; no one would think of eating, drinking, or of rest, while the Emperor showed the example and shared the hardships (qtd. in R. Pankhurst, 1990b, p. 135).

Blanc noted that, the road was admired as "remarkable work" with "a kingly structure" and was "creditable even to a European engineer" (qtd. in 1990b, pp. 135-136). Another industrial initiative undertaken by Tewodros was the effort at boat building. When the missionaries pleaded ignorance to this initiative, Tewodros spent almost one month in April

1866 attempting to build what he called “an imitation of a steamer” (1990b, p. 136). Another British observer noted:

Two large boats, sixty feet long and twenty feet wide midships, with wooden decks, and a couple of wheels affixed to the sides of each to be turned by a handle like that attached to a common grindstone, were accordingly constructed (Rassam qtd. in R. Pankhurst, 1990b, p. 136).

Although the effort failed as the material used was of unsuitable quality to a steam boat, it nevertheless was the first attempt to build a navy in the country, and challenged the myth of impossibility in relation to industrial innovation in Africa.

The Meqdalla Effect: Locating the Turning Point

Tewodros pursued friendly cooperation with Britain based on the value of Christian fraternity. Surrounded by Muslim countries, and facing the threat of Turkish and Egyptian invasions, Tewodros assumed that he would create a friendly alliance with the British due to his Christian faith. His letters strongly reflected these sentiments. His letter to Queen Victoria reflected this as he wrote, “as you are a child of Christ and I am a child of Christ, for the sake of Christ I am seeking amity and friendship” (G. Asfaw & Appleyard, 1979, p. 1b).

The relationship he tried to establish with Britain was based on the principle of searching wisdom through humility as provided in the Kebra Nagast. In a letter that appears to be exceptionally important, as it details the date of its authorship to be “7358 years after the creation of the world, 1858 years after the birth of the Lord, in the year of Mark, in the month of megabit, on the six day,” Tewodros wrote to Queen Victoria: “May God having placed in your heart friendship and love for me, grant that you may open my blind eyes for my sake” (G. Asfaw & Appleyard, 1979, p. 11b). In another letter, he wrote: “Now, what I require is wisdom, so that my eyes may be illuminated for I am blind. But now, so that I may be happy just as you are happy, by the power of God have skilled men sent to me” (G. Asfaw & Appleyard, 1979, p. 15b).

Tewodros’ adherence to the traditional views of wisdom and humility as contained in the Kebra Nagast is clear from the conception of wisdom

as light, ignorance as blindness, humility as virtue, and boastfulness as vice. In the Kebra Nagast, The Queen of Sheba used the word “light” to represent wisdom and humility was the method through which wisdom would be acquired (Kebra Nagast, 1932, p. 20). Humility builds relationships by initiating the mutual moral obligation of the parties concerned to extend a helping hand to one another. Tewodros’ correspondences were full of the expression “by the power of God” as an introductory phrase to almost all promises and actions. He asked for technical skills or “light” as he called it, from Britain with the greatest possible humility, calling himself the “untutored Ethiopian” and “a blind donkey” that needed the sight of technology. Considering that humility is a virtue in Christianity, he believed his expression would be understood as the sign of a wise emperor who was clean from the vice of arrogance. However, Tewodros did not receive responses to the letters he wrote. Even worse, he learned that the British were actually supporting the expansionist ambitions of Khedive Ismael of Egypt into the northern territories of Ethiopia (S. Pankhurst, 1955, p. 509). Infuriated by this neglect, and by internal rebellion, he started to take harsh measures. He punished his opponents severely, and imprisoned the British diplomats and few missionaries, alleging that they “insulted” him (Haile-Selassie, 1996). This can be seen in the following letter, dated 5 January 1867, from Tewodros to the head of the British envoy:

In the name of the father and the Son and of the Holy Ghost, one God. King of Kings Theodore. May it reach Mr. Rassam. ...Even Solomon, the Son of David, the great king, the Creature of God and the slave of God, had great trouble in building a Temple. He courted Hiram, King of Tyre, fell at his feet, implored him and, after having received and imported artisans, had the Temple built. But now, as I fell at the feet of the great English Queen, all her nobles, the people of her country, and all her armed forces, girding and undoing (my samma), as I was courting them, I discovered that Mr. Stern and his companions were insulting and humiliating me. Subsequently when I sent a letter of friendship... the great English Queen, the defender of the oppressed poor...withheld an answer from me. ...Subsequently I heard it said that the English and Turks had become allies and were hostile to me (G. Asfaw & Appleyard, 1979, pp. 27-28).

The British decided to send a heavily armed battalion to capture or kill Tewodros. With the assistance of powerful Ethiopian allies who wanted to overthrow Tewodros, the troops arrived at his capital Meqdalla. After the loss of many of his troops, Tewodros chose to take his own life rather than to surrender himself to the British. This became a defining moment in Ethiopian history. The British troops looted and burned several rare Ethiopian intellectual resources that were gathered by Tewodros for the National Library he had built at Meqdalla. It was reported that “some 200 mules and 15 elephants were needed to carry the loot down to the Dalanta plain” (R. Pankhurst, 1990b, p. 224). The entire collection of royally-illuminated parchments, books, manuscripts and other objects were left scattered covering the whole surface of the rocky citadel. To add insult to injury, “the British sappers set fire to all buildings so that no trace was left of the edifices which once housed the manuscripts” (1990b, p. 224).

The most significant development from the storming of Meqdalla was the development of what I call the *consciousness of power* – the subjection of consciousness to the disciplinary power of a superior gaze – towards the West. The destruction of Tewodros’ weapons and technology, his suicide and the looting of the capital’s treasury created an inward looking policy that made his successors focus on strengthening their internal political power-base rather than pursuing innovative approaches.

Tewodros’ successor, Yohannis IV, was very suspicious of Ethiopians educated in Europe, and was interested in religious conversion towards Orthodox Christianity. He was driven towards developing internal crafts rather than importing foreign artisans from abroad, and was disinterested in sending Ethiopians to study overseas (R. Pankhurst, 1990a, pp. 256-257). The handcraft work at his court was remarkably well advanced. A British eyewitness reported the production of tools, jewelry, embroidery, royal clothing, goldsmiths and silversmiths who produced “ear-rings, hairpins, bracelets, the lighter ornaments for the shields and sword-handles and the head stalls of the mule and horses were of filigree; lockets, bosses for the shield, harness and saddle” (S. Pankhurst, 1955, p. 512). According to the eyewitness, the production of Ethiopian crosses was “much prettier” than anything he had witnessed in Europe (1955, p. 513). He also saw the leather workers who produced “shields, scabbards, saddlers, harness, belts...bags of all sizes, bandoliers, cartridge

belts, pouches and sandals” (1955, p. 513). There were women’s hand-crafts, such as colorful baskets, grass bottles and bowls that were “perfectly watertight” with the finest embroidery, and “many women wore slippers or sandals, and anklets and bracelets of silver, with silver necklaces and small circular, square, or triangular lockets, beautifully wrought, with tiny ear-rings of gold or silvergilt” (1955, pp. 512-515). He emphasized that, “there is no lack of skill in the country,” and deplored the absence of commerce between Ethiopia and Europe blaming the Egyptian Government for keeping it “entirely locked from the outer world” (1955, p. 514).

Following Emperor Yohannis, Emperor Menelik II focused on reunifying and bringing the southern parts of the country into an effective administrative control. He forged a new era of relationship with the West that grew into a fully-fledged system of westernization during the period of Haile Selassie I. Since the storming of Meqdalla, the relationship with Europe was heavily influenced by consciousness of power, especially manifested in the desire for firearms from Europe. Eventually, Europe was accepted as a model of progress, a source of modernization, and a center of knowledge that could be copied through education. This consciousness of power legitimized the imitation of western systems and institutions that would go on to produce epistemic violence.

The Imitation of European Laws

Tradition and law are not necessarily antagonistic to each other. In fact, law could be understood as a refined stage of evolving traditions. One can trace the origin of European law to Greek and Roman legal traditions. German Lutheranism and English Calvinism were important traditions for the development of Civil and Common law systems in Europe. According to Berman, law creates the continuity between the past and the future; it develops from “conscious reinterpretation of the past to meet present and future needs. The law evolves, is ongoing, it has a history, it tells a story” (2003, p. 3). However, Berman’s notion of organic law is not a common feature of all legal systems. While Europe may have cultivated its traditions to grow organic laws at home, it has also forced its colonies to abandon their traditions to allow the transplantation of European laws. In Africa, colonialism obliterated the organic link between law and tradition. It legalized colonial traditions that subordinated the natives

to the settlers, the colonized to the colonizers; it essentialized ethnic belonging by transferring the administration of ethnic identity from flexible customary practices to fixed legal rules. Postcolonial elites adopted the colonial system that “legalized” the absolute power of the leaders without the consent of the people. Though Ethiopia was the only African country not to be colonized by Europe, the development of a consciousness of power towards the West, as discussed in the previous section, facilitated the adoption of western laws and institutions. The legal history of Ethiopia reveals the emergence of a system of elite rule that based its justification on the promise of a new beginning.

The concept of *addis*, the new, is often considered as *zemenawi*, which means modern or western. The first modern capital of the country was named “Addis Ababa,” which means “New Flower.” Since Haile Selassie came to power in the 1930s, Ethiopian leaders have used popular slogans vowing for the birth of a new Ethiopia. This notion of the new is always imagined by its clear distinction from the old. The conception of the new as a break from the past, from tradition to modernization, led to the adoption of new laws that invalidated the old and traditional ones. Traditional and customary laws of the country were scrapped and replaced with imitated European laws in order to create a new way of ruling society. The new laws became instruments of violence against traditions: they paved the way through which the binding power of custom and tradition could be obliterated and replaced by strong elitist institutions and systems in Ethiopia. This section analyzes the transition of Ethiopia from monarchial to westernized system of rule through the adoption of western law.

The legal history of Ethiopia reveals a deep antagonism between traditional and modern conceptions of law. Abera Jembere noted that unlike European countries that achieved constitutionalism through social evolution and the influential teachings of philosophers, a move towards constitutionalism in Ethiopia was introduced by Emperor Haile Selassie I (1998, p. 166). Using his traditional authority, the emperor granted modern constitutions to his subjects: the first in 1931, and the second in 1955. The 1931 constitution created a bicameral parliament with the House of Senate whose members were appointed by the emperor himself, and the House of Deputies whose members were elected by the nobility. It created an executive branch of government with the emperor at the top

of the executive with specified powers and prerogatives. It stipulated the rights and duties of the people, the powers of ministers and judges, and the budget of the government (1998, p. 169). Through the constitution, obedience to the law became a condition of relating with the state as an appointee or an employee. Article 19 of the 1931 Constitution sets out the new rule of relationship between persons and ideas, or individuals and institutions based on the personification of the law. Article 19 declares that:

All Ethiopian subjects, provided they fulfil the conditions prescribed by the Law and by the decrees promulgated by His Majesty the Emperor, may be designated officers of the army or may be appointed to any other offices or posts in the service of the State ("Ethiopian Constitution of 1931").

The vocabularies used in the constitution to create new fields for the exercise of power were hitherto unknown in the country. Parliament, senate, chamber, ministers, executive, decree, and judiciary allowed the emergence of new sets of institutions that required new rules of inclusion and exclusion to office, based on new skills, beliefs, and experiences. The emperor became the Head of the Executive, the "fountain of justice," the agent of change, the law-giver, the Commander-in-Chief, and the defender of the Orthodox Church (Jembere, 1998, p. 165). He maintained the power to decide the organization of the administration, the constitution of the army, the declaration of war, the signing of a treaty with foreign powers, and the granting of titles of power, land, or pardon. Traditionally, most of these prerogatives were not new. However, what was new was their objectification by means of a written law. Like material objects, they were extracted from their traditional contexts, turned into appropriable or deniable goods, and became the exclusive holdings of the power of the emperor. This totalization and objectification of power symbolized by the constitution became one of the most important aspects of transition from the monarchical system to Elitdom, a system of political rule established by concepts and practices that are alien to the beliefs and experiences of the people. The notion of power that was embedded in traditional relationships started to move to a new vision of power that could be controlled only from the center by the use of written alien rules.

The constitution did not guarantee ways through which the nobility could share in the power of the government (Jembere, 1998, pp. 167-168).

Conflict between members of the nobility and the emperor ensued that led to a compromise that resulted in the addition of a second part to the constitution. The addition recognized the rights and privileges of the nobility, especially their *rist gult* which is their granted land holdings (1998, p. 168). However, their independent authority was nevertheless construed by the unlimited power of the emperor (Clapham, 1969). In the constitutional document, under the signature of the emperor, a statement was included which reads:

We, bishops, princes, nobles, officials and scholars of Ethiopia have agreed to be bound by this constitution granted by Emperor Haile Selassie I. To clarify the first part, we have also reached agreement to the terms of these specific provisions (Wolde-Meskel, 1970 [1962 EC], p. 58).

For the first time in the history of the country, the source of authority for leadership emanated from a document written under the influence of consciousness of power. The symbolic significance of the document is very important as it moved the source of authority from society, from traditional relationships of obligation and belonging, to the hands of elites at the pinnacle of power. It augured the coming of Elitdom. It led to the triumph of the letter, the written word, as an important means of claiming power over the society. By extracting authority and legitimacy from traditional sources, and putting them in the hands of the Emperor by means of a constitution, the central state became the sole justification not just for the Emperor's function and power, but also for its own existence. Article 5 of the 1931 constitution declared the unconditional sanctity of the power of the emperor as:

By virtue of His Imperial Lineage as well as by the anointment he received, the person of the Emperor is sacred, His dignity inviolate and His power incontestable. He therefore enjoys by right to all honors due him by tradition and in conformity with the present Constitution. The Law provides that whoever shall dare to harm the Majesty of the Emperor shall be punished ("Ethiopian Constitution of 1931").

This process of making power its own referent by removing it from its legitimizing and mitigating contexts in tradition was intensified by the

second constitution in 1955. The second constitution was initiated by the federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia (Jembere, 1998, p. 170). The drafting process took six years. Three American experts and three Ethiopian scholars were active in the process. The American constitution was its principal source. Jembere noted that important individual freedoms and rights from the US constitution were introduced, such as *habeas corpus*; the prohibition of ex-post facto legislation; freedom of the press and assembly; protection against searches and seizures, and the taking of property without compensation; the due process clause and the right to be confronted with witnesses; and assistance in obtaining witnesses (1998). Various European constitutions and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights were also consulted.

The introduction of these greater constitutional guarantees should be seen hand in hand with the ever growing power of the Emperor. The 1955 constitution made the emperor a Head of State, a Head of Government, and the overseer of the justice through his Crown Court which reviewed judgments given by the regular courts. In reality, the King of Kings was free to rule with more absolute power than any of his predecessors. The extent to which the constitution contained provisions that allowed greater freedoms and rights had little significance to ordinary people who had no access to the modern courts. The rights provided under the constitution and other legal regimes were granted from the Emperor; they were not part of the daily vocabulary of interaction among individuals and, they did not become part of the living culture of the people (Beckstrom, 1973). The people hardly established their relationships through them or saw the laws as their absolute guarantors for the protection of their interests. Also, they seldom were able to exercise accountability over their leaders using the laws. However, the adoption of western legal and political ideas in the society without the peoples' active participation allowed elites to lead the people into a process of domestication, a situation that increased the dependency of the people on elite institutions, and elite leadership, while alienating them from traditional relationships that had offered some customary protections.

The reason for the lack of participation was not because the concepts of law and rights were alien to Ethiopians. Quite the contrary, several cases could be presented to show that in Ethiopia, there was a rich tradition that upheld law and justice as great ideals. *Fitih Fitretawi*, which means

natural justice, is a well-known concept in the traditional education system. The proverb “a chicken lost without justice is more cause for concern than a mule gone fairly judged” expresses the significance of justice in the culture of the people (Jembere, 1998, p. 31). The tradition of the road side courts where disputing individuals would submit themselves to any passer-by on the street for arbitration is another example. The passer-by would hear both parties and give his judgment based on the common belief which says, “Justice is given by man according to his view and by God because He is all-knowing” (1998, p. 29). If one or both parties disagree with the judgment of the passer-by, the latter would tie the tip of the clothes of both parties, and refer them to the nearest authorities. The proverb, “the law ties together the shabby garment of the poor with the finest outfit of the rich” reflects the cultural basis of this tradition (1998, p. 30).

The presentation of law in a written form is not a new experience either. In 1450, King Zara Yacob ordered Orthodox Church scholars to prepare a written law. The church scholars submitted a draft which became a law under the name *Fewuse Menfesawi*, which means “spiritual remedy,” or “canonical penances.” The book had 62 articles but its application was limited to the reign of Zara Yacob, and it governed spiritual affairs more than secular ones. Another legal document that became influential in Ethiopia’s legal history was the *Fitha Nagast* or Justice of Kings, which governed civil and criminal matters. According to Budge, the *Fitha Nagast* was initially drawn from various apostolic canons and laws and was translated from an Arabic text with “an Ethiopian flavour” (1928, p. 568). Hence, it belongs to the interpretative and incorporative tradition of knowledge in the country. However, the new regimes of laws introduced since Haile Selassie did not consider the importance of these and other traditional laws.

Imitation, not interpretation, was the principal mechanism by which the new laws were adopted. Following the constitution of 1955, six codes were issued. These include a civil code, a penal code, a commercial code, a maritime code, a civil procedure code, and a criminal procedure code. “These codes were all either drafted by foreign lawyers or inspired by foreign sources” (Vanderlinden, 1966-1967, p. 255). The codification process of the 1960 Civil Code of Ethiopia provides a useful illustration. The Civil Code, composed of five books with 3367 articles, is the biggest

body of law that regulates large areas of life in the country today. Two actors took part in the codification process. They included an expert and a commissioner. The expert was a French jurist called Rene David who was commissioned to prepare a draft code for Ethiopia. The commission was comprised of Ethiopian individuals elected to discuss the draft. According to Singer, the expert brought European norms, and the commission brought the values of the ruling section of the Ethiopian Empire, making both parties unrepresentative of the values of the majority of Ethiopians (Singer, 1970). Moreover, the commission was more or less insignificant as it had “a role little more important than that of a translator” (1970, p. 51). Commenting on the absence of interaction between the expert and the commission, Singer argued that:

The interaction between the expert and the Commission would obviously be crucial to the final working product. But here the expert was given a special status; though a member of the Commission, he was considered superior and did not work with the other commissioners, as one would have expected (1970, p. 50).

The outcome was a code “heavily influenced by the French model, and that all of the rules examined are products of a single (western) legal culture, with a common core of categories and history” (Jembere, 1998, p. 163). Jembere noted that “the customary law – so to speak, the ‘pure peoples’ law – was largely scrapped” (1998, p. 39) by the following provision: “Unless otherwise expressly provided, all rules whether written or customary previously in force concerning matters provided for in this Code shall be replaced by this Code and are hereby repealed” (“Civil Code of Ethiopia, 1960, *Negarit Gazzeta*, Proclamation no. 165/1960, 19th Year no. 2,” Art. 3347, 1). The scrapping of traditional laws achieved by this provision was “unprecedented in Africa and, it seems, without recent precedent anywhere” (Krzeczunowiczi, 1963, p. 175). Criticizing the sweeping nature of the law, Brietzke observed that “David’s inability to recognize custom as law contributes to the ‘fantasy law’ atmosphere of the Codes” (1974, p. 155). He argued that this complete disregard of Ethiopian traditional laws and custom had a colonial character. By discarding the traditional and customary laws of the country, the new regime of laws disregarded the interest of the majority of Ethiopians and

“served the interests of those who would preserve the *status quo* – the westernized, landed and urbanized elite” (1974, p. 167).

Centralization and Elite Absolutism

The adoption of western laws had the effect of creating institutions that are violent to tradition. The most significant manifestation of this violence is the silencing of local histories, knowledges and experiences, while reinventing the state as a sole source of authority using instruments of power that are alien to the people. According to Clapham, the Ethiopian constitution had two purposes: centralization and modernization (1969, p. 35). Jembere noted that “the most important historical goal that the 1931 Constitution meant to achieve was to break down the powers of the regional lords, who gradually had become strong, so as to bring them under the powers of the centralised state machinery” (1998, p. 66). Furthermore, Shiferaw Bekele argued that Ethiopian scholars have been “militant advocates of centralization...to the extent of counterpoising the monarchy with the *mekwanent* (regional lords), the former seen as persistently fighting to strengthen the central institutions while the latter were persistently warring to strengthen their regional powers” (1990, p. 296). This interpretation of western educated intellectuals reflects their epistemology of power as a struggle of self-interested antagonistic forces. Bekele stressed that the interpretation of the intellectuals ignored the role of the traditional institutions which served as “adhesive forces” between the center and the region (1990, p. 297). Only when one takes for granted the essential distinctiveness of the regions rather than their relational existence with the imperial center, and only when power struggle is viewed as the only reality that defines the nature of political actors, could one justify the attempt of centralization as a form of nation building. In the same way that Thomas Hobbes presupposed that the natural order of society was that of competition and war, thereby justifying the absolute power of the central state, many considered the relationship between the King of Kings and the regional Kings as a form of power struggle alone. As noted by Bekele, the regional governors were as important as the central organs of the empire. The strength of the state was measured in terms of the strength of the relationship between the center and the regions, not in terms of the abolition of the power of the regions

by the central government. Thus, what Ethiopian emperors wanted was the maintenance of strong ties with regional rulers, the strengthening of the traditional relationships of loyalty and mutual respect between the two, not the withdrawal or annexation of the power of the regions by the Emperor.

In order to strengthen the traditional relationship between the national and regional centers of power, a family relationship was often established between the royal families of the Emperor and the regional leaders. Moreover, regional lords were expected to participate in the central institutions of power as regional governors and royal counselors. For a part of the year they were required to stay near the royal court and were "obliged to take part not only in royal councils, but also sit on royal tribunals and to participate in other activities of the King. Very often, they held court offices in addition to their provincial charges" (Bekele, 1990, p. 295). In the royal council, the most important decisions, such as measures against rebellion, were decided with the participation of the regional lords. Bekele noted that "procedurally, the lords who attended a particular council would all give their opinion starting from the lowest official and going up one by one to the highest. The last to speak was the king whose words were final" (1990, p. 295). Allowing lower level officials to speak before their superiors enabled the former to express their views without knowing the view of higher officials. For the Emperor, it provided an opportunity to measure the level of support he could expect before passing a final decision. This suggests that Ethiopian emperors had no vested interest in destroying the power of the regional lords. Rather, they wanted to strengthen their traditional ties by allowing the latter to participate in the administration of the empire. This practice of recognizing regional centers of power as part and parcel of the empire coincided with the religious belief and cultural practice of the people.

The Ethiopian tradition considered the existence of not just one but many centers of political and cultural life. The original Ark of the Covenant represented the grand central position in the empire. It is believed that it still exists at Axum Zion church, which is located at the seat of the earliest Ethiopian empire. In parallel to this, every Christian church that exists in the country must have a replica of the original Ark of the Covenant. The site of the Covenant, both the original and the replicas, are

considered central points in the social and cultural life of the community that surrounds them. Prayers, meetings, burial ceremonies, arbitrations, reconciliations, weddings, festivals and celebrations take place around the church or under a nearby tree which is considered sacred. Here, what is important is that the replica in each church enjoys a great deal of reverence as the original Ark of the Covenant in Axum, highlighting the view of Ethiopia as a multi-centric place.

In the same way, regional lords were important centers of power, and they assumed that position by virtue of their valid relationship with the grand central figure at the center of the empire. By virtue of this relationship, they acquired the titles of *nigus*, which means king, and the emperor at the center was called *Niguse Negest* which means King of Kings. Their function had no meaning without their relationship to the center, and the emperor at the center would not acquire the title of King of Kings without securing the recognition of the regional kings. At the center, the King of Kings had no standing army. The army and revenue were raised by the regional kings. Here, values such as trust and loyalty were important to maintain the relationship between the center and the regions. In the Ethiopian tradition, the center and the regions were not oppositional forces. However, the absolute centralization of power under the law was informed by a western concept of dualism that negated this symbiotic relationship.

It is also worth considering how the centralization of power, especially absolute power under the Emperor involves an aspect of the lawlessness of law, a situation where the law giver remains above the law by possessing its source, by becoming the originator of legal rules. This was clearly evident since the first constitution was issued in 1931. Despite the constitution, the Emperor “insisted upon the right to rule by decree, to appoint and dismiss his ministers without reference to parliament, he could appoint members of the senate, judges, and even the mayors of municipalities” (Spencer, 1984, p. 257). Law as a license to lawlessness for the leader and a prohibition for the rest has become a common phenomenon in many countries, not just Ethiopia. In this situation, the sovereignty of the law giver lies in the vulnerability of the citizen, in the latter’s inability to find protection against the state. Being the only power that can violate the law without punishment, the leader becomes the only law unto itself, and its interest becomes the sole prohibition against its

own action. Because the law is not inculcated in the traditional cultural life, however liberating its provisions may be, it nevertheless remained superficial and exterior to daily life. Consequently, the achievement of centralization involves the process of liberating the law giver from limitations of traditional obligations that would otherwise have offered some protection to the people. It also contributed to the rising hegemony of the state at the expense of the increasing vulnerability of the mass population, a situation that intensifies what Desalegne Rahmato called “the rurality of the peasant world...[where] rurality means enduring poverty, voicelessness, and submission” (2009, p. 284).

The Emergence of the Imitative Education System

Following the historical event at Meqdalla where Tewodros committed suicide and the Ethiopian national treasury was either looted or burned by the British army, consciousness of power brought about a contradiction between true loyalty to the Kebra Nagast and acceptance of western hegemony. While modern European thought espoused the idea that world history has one destiny or center which is Europe, the Kebra Nagast's view of Ethiopia as a covenant place, on the other hand, challenged the subordination of the land to any earthly power. As witnessed through the Berlin conference, and the Tripartite Treaty, Europe had a colonial desire over Ethiopia. Ethiopians, on the other hand, were interested in acquiring weapons from Europe in order to defend themselves against it. The hallmark of their diplomatic wisdom rested in dealing with this contradiction and in attempting to maintain a delicate balance between friendship and enmity with Europe. The various treaties between Ethiopian and European powers reflected some level of compromise between these conflicting interests. For example, the Wuchale treaty of 2 May 1889 gave significant concessions to Italy over Ethiopia as reflected in Article 17, which allowed Italy to play a role in Ethiopia's foreign relations. Only when Emperor Menelik and Empress Tayitu realized that the treaty was a pretext for a colonial project that they revoked it and declared war against Italy. The Emperor declared that all able bodied Ethiopians should follow him to the war front to defend the faith, the family and the land, and all disabled or incapable Ethiopians should pray for victory. Regional lords galvanized their forces, and

priests carried a replica of the Ark of the Covenant for the war front. The consequence was that an African army of untrained peasants defeated a modern European Army at the Battle of Adwa on 1 March 1896. Following the victory at Adwa, Italy signed the Addis Ababa Treaty accepting the independence of Ethiopia, and agreed to pay war indemnity in exchange for prisoners of war. Moreover, most European powers rallied to start diplomatic relations with Ethiopia by opening embassies in Addis Ababa, and in 1926 Ethiopia became a member of the League of Nations.

The development of these relationships with powerful countries created an irresistible attraction towards the West. This attraction led to the imitation of western symbols and styles of government such as the imitation of the western education system. The traditional view of knowledge as a search for wisdom to enrich the soul started to change in favor of the search for western knowledge for the sake of power. This change increased the association of knowledge with power and the shift from tradition to seeing the West as a source of knowledge. Especially since the period of Haile Selassie, Ethiopia started to disregard the very traditions that helped it maintain its independence and started importing western ideas and institutions. This development started the process of alienating the state from the people.

Forty years after the Battle of Adwa, Italy returned with full military might to erase the shameful scar it received in Africa. At this time, Ethiopia was in a much better military position. There were a constitution and parliament, a more centralized state and educated bureaucracy, and a national army with better weapons than in 1896. Italy was also more prepared and determined not just to win but also revenge the defeat at Adwa (Scott, 1978). One of the fiercest battles was fought at Maychew on 31 March 1936, where Ethiopians were heavily defeated and the Emperor Haile Selassie left the country to appeal to the League of Nations. Italy then occupied Ethiopia for five years until the Emperor returned to his throne in 1941 with the support of the British army. The return of the Emperor with the support of a European power opened a renewed chapter when Ethiopia submitted to the institutional and ideological supremacy and influence of the West. The modernization of the state or, more strictly, the modernization of the government along the lines of westernization became the typical feature of Ethiopia after the World

War II. The most typical instance of this feature was the reform of the Ethiopian education system.

The Emergence of Modern Education

The development of modern education in Ethiopia can be divided into two stages. The first stage took place from 1908 to 1935 when modern education started as a curious experiment towards westernization and rapidly expanded during the period of Haile Selassie until the invasion by Italy. The second stage started with the occupation by Italy and encompasses the entire period since then as a complete Eurocentric education system was implemented in the country. Three important architects could be identified in the early development of modern education in Ethiopia. These include the office of the Emperor, western educated intellectuals, and western missionaries. During the first stage, the growth of the school was a gradual step by step process that reflected the dilemma between Ethiocentrism and Eurocentrism.

The first initiative to open a public school was implemented during the reign of Emperor Menelik II whose victory at Adwa opened up broader international diplomatic relationships with Europe. According to Wagaw, Ethiopian leaders felt acutely embarrassed as a result of a lack of expertise in foreign language, technology and diplomatic arts, and established a school “after the European model, independent of traditional education institutions” (1990, p. 69). At the initial stage, it can be argued that Menelik II was not enthusiastic about replicating the European model of schooling in Ethiopia. Menelik’s idea of education focused on training translators and building on traditional skills. When the first initiative to open a school based on the European model was presented to him by the British educated *Hakim* Workineh Eshete, the Emperor and Patriarch of the Orthodox Church, Abuna Mattewos, showed reluctance due to the perceived danger of exposing the mind of Ethiopian students to the religion of their foreign teachers. According to Bahru Zewde, “a compromise between tradition and innovation” (2002, p. 23) was worked out by allowing only Coptic teachers to be in charge of the school. The outcome was the opening of the first modern Ethiopian public school named after the Emperor in Addis Ababa in 1908. The primary goal of education was to gain language and administrative experts who would

serve the government in its international relationships and its “modern” institutions. This is clear from the subjects studied that, at the beginning, included French, English, math and drawing and later “Amharic, Italian, Arabic, Geography, history and sport” (2002, p. 24).

Further declarations issued by Menelik II emphasized the need to improve customary practices and the transfer of traditional skills from generation to generation. For example, in 1906 Menelik passed a proclamation declaring compulsory education for young persons (Wolde-Meskel, 1970 [1962 EC], p. 600). Although implementation is difficult to ascertain, the declaration denounced attitudes that denigrated traditional craftsmanship, and demanded that parents send their children to school from the age of six at the pain of losing the right to transfer their properties to their children when they die. It also provided that the government would prepare schools and appoint teachers. Later, a more strict declaration was issued in 1929 where parents were ordered to send their children or face a penalty of 50 birr. Parents were also ordered to choose a traditional skill and train their children so as to enable them to earn a living. Failure to do so would cause a penalty of 50 birr (Wolde-Meskel, 1970 [1962 EC], p. 601).

It is possible to see that this was a period of reforming tradition rather than abandoning it. Foreign education was desired without foreign ideology, especially religion. Here, western achievement was regarded as a source of inspiration to upgrade and improve existing socio-political institutions. The Emperor saw the need to change traditionally stagnant practices while keeping intact the cultural elements that were perceived valuable to the political and cultural system. However, western educated intellectuals felt that the Emperor’s initiative was not enough.

The Ethiopian intellectuals who returned after completing higher education training from western countries came up with a more radical approach towards education reform in the country. Zewde considers the Ethiopian intelligentsia starting from the period of Menelik II to the period before the Italian invasion as the first and second generations (2002). The first generation of intellectuals obtained exposure to western education through fortuitous means, or as protégés of Menelik II. Other intellectuals obtained western education as self-educated individuals who created some form of relationship with missionaries in the country, or as graduates of Menelik’s high school. Members of this group of intellectuals were concerned with modernization. However, their

recommendations towards it were far from being unanimous. For example, one of the protégés of Menelik II was the Italian-educated Afework Gebreyesus who opposed the modernizing role of tradition and advocated a colonial model of education in the country. Afework was later to serve the Italian government during the occupation, and was reappointed as ambassador by Haile Selassie after liberation. Another Russian-educated scholar, Tekle Hawariyat Tekle Mariyam, recommended the importation of the Russian education system to Ethiopia. However, while the above group of intellectuals advocated a western model, there was another group called the self-educated intellectuals who had a stronger foundation in traditional education. These were graduates of the famous Raguel School who presented a strong attachment with the importance of Ethiopian values (Zewde, 2002, p. 23). As argued throughout this thesis, consciousness of power that favors western experiences played against the search for traditional sources of education.

The reform suggested by the western educated intellectuals was based on the superiority of the European model of education. However, there was an attempt to find innovative solutions to the contradiction posed between westernization and tradition. One of the most advocated solutions in this regard was the recommendation to follow the example of Japan. Similarities such as Ethiopia's victory over Italy at Adwa in 1896 and Japan's victory over Russia in 1905, and the existence of an imperial tradition in both countries generated the passion to make Ethiopia the "Japan of Africa." Hence Japanization was conceived as a living solution to the problem of transition from Feudalism to Capitalism (Zewde, 2002, p. 203). Gebre Hiwot Bayikedagne's recommendation illuminates the position of the intellectuals.

The task awaiting the present Ethiopian king is not like that of his predecessors. In the old days, Ignorance had held sway. Today, however, a strong and unassailable enemy called the European mind has risen against her. Whoever opens his door to her [i.e., European mind] prospers; whoever closes his door will be destroyed. If our Ethiopia accepts European mind, no one would dare attack her; if not, she will disintegrate and be enslaved. Hence, let us hope that His Highness Menelik's heir would examine and follow the example of Japanese government (qtd. in Zewde, 2002, p. 206).

Here, Japanization does not appear as a defense against Eurocentrism. If considered with Kebede's critical assessment of Bayikedagne's Eurocentric proclivities (2006), the latter's proposal could be regarded simply as an attempt to persuade the Ethiopian king to adopt westernization. The Japanese government viewed Eurocentrism as a danger to the national culture and in 1890 issued the Imperial Rescript to implement the motto of western skill but Japanese culture while Ethiopians had never thought of a cultural policy. Therefore, for Kebede, Japanization failed because unlike their Japanese counterparts, Ethiopian leaders failed to generate interpretative power from their tradition and culture.

Zewde considers the cultural estrangement of the western educated students at the individual level but without presenting culture as the crucial point for Ethiopia's failure to modernize (2002). Considering students sent to study abroad, he noted that unlike most Japanese students who studied technical skills, "Ethiopians preferred social studies" (2002, p. 79). This suggests that they were apt to make socio-cultural rather than techno-engineering inquiries. Moreover, he admits that many of them felt alienated from their society and had difficulties reintegrating themselves upon their return.

Another important distinction was that Japanese intellectuals, unlike their Ethiopian counterparts, promoted the belief in the uniqueness of Japan. *Nihonjinron*, which literally means "discussions of the Japanese", refers to the vast array of "literature which thinking elites have produced to define the uniqueness of Japanese culture, society and national character" (Yoshino, 1992, p. 2). Japanese intellectuals, journalists, critics, writers and business elites fiercely competed against each other to disseminate *Nihonjinron* among the population. Television shows were used to intentionally promote Japanese nationalism. Between 1945 and 1978, more than 700 books were published with *Nihonjinron* as the title, many of which saw multiple reprints (Kazufumi & Befu, 1993). For example, Doi Takeo's "The Anatomy of Dependence" was reprinted 13 times, and research shows that the popularity of *Nihonjinron* still continues to rise (Kazufumi & Befu, 1993). Japanese elites used a legend that the Ark of the Covenant was taken to Japan to promote Japanese nationalism, ironically using the Ark to cultivate more pride than is evident in Ethiopia, whose history, tradition and religious practices relies so heavily on the Ark's journey to and residence in Axum.

This promotion of national uniqueness can be challenged, however, when uniqueness is constructed solely by considering external cultural threats rather than internal experience or dynamism. This can be seen in Negritude, which is an intellectual construction of African elites designed for the purpose of combating the denigration of western theories over the latter's definition of African identities (Achebe, 1975). In the same way, in Japan, the celebration of Samurai culture in business has been criticized as a modern invention where a "loyal male subject of production is celebrated as a Samurai" (Hiroshi, 1995, p. 103). Hiroshi argued that, in this self-imposed colonial drama, Japan colonized itself and the Japanese played the role of the colonizer and the colonized: "From the standpoint of consciousness such an operation might be repudiated as self-deception. If we see the whole cultural system as an organism, however, this operation can be thought of as a strategy for survival in a difficult environment" (1995, p. 107). In this sense, the Samurai tradition has helped to bridge the historical gap between modernization and tradition, to represent the strength of the nation, and to confront the objectifying gaze of the western subject. Moreover, in light of the philosophy of *Nihonjinron*, the criticism of self-colonization may strengthen the fundamental drive towards finding uniqueness from which the Japanese appear to have derived a great deal of resilience and energy. In Ethiopia, however, the debate on the relevance of western education fails to even compare Ethiopia's unique traditional philosophies, values and realities with that of the West. Instead, intellectuals focus on comparing one foreign model with another. If they compare at all, it is usually by first considering Ethiopian traditions as backward or irrelevant.

The third group that played a significant role in shaping the country's educational journey was western missionaries. Without any large scale social interaction with the population, this group played a significant role through the influence they created in the life of one person, Teferi Mekonen, who later became Emperor Haile Selassie I. In Ethiopia, there are historical and ideological factors that inhibited the popularity of Catholic missionaries among the population. First, the Kebra Nagast considered that Rome or the Vatican had failed to keep the true faith in Christ. Second, Catholic missionaries in Ethiopia had been making consistent efforts to convert the Ethiopian state into Catholicism. Their success at converting King Susnyos caused devastating

consequences to the country in 1622. As a result, “to this day in high-land Ethiopia, the word Catholicism is associated with anti-Ethiopianism” (Wagaw, 1990, p. 71). Due to these factors, the missionaries focused on using their good relations with the leaders to spread their ideas rather than directly preaching to the people, especially in the northern part of the country.

Teferi Mekonen grew up in the south eastern part of the country, in Harar, and was tutored by French and Ethiopian Catholic priests. Wagaw mentions an influential incident in Teferi’s youth. He wrote: “Indeed, one of the people [Teferi] fondly recalled was his teacher, *Aba* Samuel, a Catholic priest who lost his life while saving young Teferi’s life in a boating accident” (1990, p. 71). This experience might have contributed to Teferi being more sympathetic to foreigners than his predecessors, including his decision to appoint Catholic Jesuits to positions of influence in the reform of Ethiopia’s education system. Moreover, Teferi had a “semi-spiritual and semi-secular communion with Jarosseau,” the Catholic archbishop of Harar (Zewde, 2002, p. 174). In the correspondence between the two, the fact that “Teferi kept the archbishop informed of practically all his actions and important events, is...vital in reconstructing the evolution of Tefari’s career” (Wagaw, 1990, p. 174). In addition, Teferi’s experience at Menelik II School, where the Coptic teachers applied strict discipline indiscriminate of social position, might have resulted in additional disenchantment towards the influence of Orthodox religion in education (Zewde, 2002, p. 24). In any case, in 1925, Teferi himself opened the second school, the Teferi Mekonen School, where the French model of learning became predominant. From 1925 onwards, the French oriented Teferi Mekonen’s model of schooling expanded to various regions of the country. The interest was so intense that students were sponsored, meals provided, and even in some cases, like in Sidamo, students were detained throughout the year because it was feared that they may not come back to school after vacation (Zewde, 2002, p. 27). Missionary schools and community schools also expanded dramatically. Alliance Française, with branches in Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa, was important for training influential figures and for having strong ties with the Teferi Mekonen School. The Swedish Evangelical School, the Greek, Armenian, Italian, Zionist, and American schools also expanded. However, due to the prevalent Eurocentric view of the time, the Ethiopian

Orthodox Church was excluded from contributing to the expansion of modern education in the country.

What is clear from the above assessment is that the Ethiopian education system that began in the early 20th century developed without the intellectual legacy of the country, including its traditional education system. Instead of applying the interpretative tradition described in Chapter Three, schools served as places of cultural indoctrination for the building of a new system of rule. The curriculum, methodology and the majority of the teachers were unanimous in avoiding the Ethiopian tradition, especially the ideological belief in the Kebra Nagast and the intellectual legacy of the Orthodox Church. The school became the new intellectual birthplace for the Ethiopian ruling elite. This was especially evident throughout the long reign of Teferi/Haile Selassie who consistently expressed unwavering determination to modernize his country using western ideas, western experts, and institutions imitated from the West. This is the embryonic stage of Elitdom. Under the heavy shadow of consciousness of power, Eurocentric institutions emerged to pave the way for the coming of a new breed of leaders from the school.

The Post World War II Education Period

The five years of Italian occupation brought a serious setback in the progress of the western school. About two thirds of educated Ethiopians were killed by the fascist forces, especially following the failed bombing attempt on the life of the Italian general Graziani in February 1937. In 1941, after the Italian occupation, the role of missionaries became even more important in the development of higher education in the country. The Emperor invited Canadian Jesuits to rebuild the Teferi Mekonen School. The Jesuits, led by Dr. Lucien Matte, started their work in 1945, and in 1950 Matte was given a new task of organizing a two year higher education study program to prepare students for further studies abroad. The outcome was the establishment of the University College of Addis Ababa. A few months after the establishment of the college, Matte was sent to Europe and North America to recruit staff and purchase textbooks and other materials for the college (Wagaw, 1990).

The Emperor emphasized to the people the importance of education saying, "The salvation of our country, Ethiopia, as We have repeatedly

stated to you, lies primarily in education” (Haile Selassie, 1967). However, if relevance was ever considered for the new college it was its relevance to the educational standards of Britain, not to the condition of life in Ethiopia. Wagaw explained that the preoccupation of the founders of the University College of Addis Ababa was to get international recognition through affiliation with the British University system (1990, pp. 73-74). Due to the heavy administrative and financial requirements of the University of London, the aspiration for affiliation was later abandoned. Through a charter published in 28 July 1954, the University College of Addis Ababa was established. Another feature of the college was the predominance of social studies, which made it look like “an undergraduate liberal arts college” (1990, p. 76). The various colleges established were modelled by the active involvement of foreign directors, advisors and teachers who had little information about the Ethiopian experience. For example, as the national economy and the people’s livelihood depended and still depends on agriculture, the importance of the field of agricultural studies was axiomatic. However, foreign administrators and knowledges were privileged above Ethiopian expertise even in this vital field. On 15 May 1952, a treaty to establish a College of Agriculture was signed with the United States. It was agreed that the United States would appoint the director of the fund for the college. This director would also become the college’s president, with the power to decide on every aspect of the education system including “admission of students, establishment of curricula, conduct of examinations,” control of financial and other resources, “appointment and discharge of personnel, and all other administrative roles” (1990, p. 80). The government of Ethiopia provided the land, and the United States government contracted Oklahoma State University which exercised “full control over the operation of the college” (1990, p. 81).

The consultation for the preparation of opening a university started with the active involvement of the Jesuits with Dr. Matte’s consultation, but was eventually superseded by a powerful ally, the United States Government. Following the recommendation of a team of experts from the University of Utah, an agreement was signed with the US government for the establishment of a national university. The Emperor, who assumed the portfolio of the Minister of Education in 1941, became its first Chancellor. At the convocation ceremony held on 18 December 1961, the Emperor addressed diplomats, ministers and faculty members,

and students on the purpose of the University. It is striking to note that there was a significant rift between rhetoric and practice. The Emperor spoke about the glory of the Ethiopian intellectual and cultural heritage and the need to build the future based on the legacy of the past. In his discourse, the purpose of university education was claimed to be for the cultural development of the people:

A fundamental objective of this University must be the safeguarding and developing of the culture of the people which it serves. This University is a product of that culture; it is the grouping together of those capable of understanding and using the accumulated heritage of the Ethiopian people. In this University, men and women will, working in association with one another, study the well-springs of our culture, trace its development, and mould its future. That which enabled us today to open a university of such a standard is the wealth of literature and learning now extinct elsewhere in the world which through hard work and perseverance our forefathers have preserved for us (Haile Selassie qtd. in M. Kebede, 2006, p. 15).

Kebede draws attention to the wide gap between rhetoric and practice. Practically, it is inconceivable to see how the people grouped together to work in the Haile Selassie I University were capable of contributing to the preservation and development of the accumulated heritage of the Ethiopian people. The teaching staff were predominantly foreigners, the curriculum they used was copied from other countries' textbooks, and the medium of instruction applied was either English or French. Moreover, the basic ideological foundation of schooling was left to foreigners. By detaching education from the traditional ideology and the cultural values of the people in the name of secularizing it, the government actually enabled foreign religious groups to inculcate their own worldviews into the system.

Another example worth mentioning is the role of Protestantism in mass education. *Yemisirache Dimtse Literacy Campaign*, which means the "Voice of the Gospel" Literacy Campaign, started in 1962 under the Ethiopian Evangelical Church, Mekane Yesus (ECMY). The project was funded by the Lutheran World Federation. Through the Campaign, "more than half a million students had been involved up to 1975" (Sjostrom &

Sjostrome, 1983, p. 45). The objectives of the campaign include teaching reading, writing, arithmetic, civic education and the promotion of socioeconomic changes. Despite the secular objectives of the campaign, the Evangelical Church had a clear spiritual motive for involving itself in secular activities in the country. The 1958 Constitution of the Church aimed at preserving and extending “the pure teaching of the Gospel” by activities such as “[t]he establishment and maintenance of educational, medical, and theological institutions directly or through affiliated councils” (1983, p. 166). This aim of spreading religious beliefs using secular initiatives was clearly stipulated in the *Yemisirache Dimtse Literacy Campaign’s* Constitution. The purpose of the campaign was “to win for Jesus Christ those who are without a saving knowledge of the Gospel,” and “to deepen the spiritual life of existing believers” (1983, p. 166).

It is difficult to measure the impact of the program on the traditional worldview of the people. However, an evaluation conducted after a decade found that the evangelical church, despite its policy of tolerance to the imperial and the socialist regime, went even further to become part of the implementation apparatus of the state. Although it did not operate as a government department, “it can be argued, however, that ECMY serves the political power in an indirect way...ECMY sees it as a Christian duty to obey and cooperate with the secular powers as long as that is compatible with the Church’s creed” (Sjostrom & Sjostrome, 1983, p. 177).

This last observation suggests the attraction of Ethiopian leaders towards non-established religious groups that have strong ideological and resource backup from outside. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church made no significant initiatives to incorporate its ideologies into the secular systems although the Emperor had been its traditional guardian. In fact, attempts were made to “modernize” the church by establishing a college in line with western theological foundations. The college was staffed with foreigners who taught subjects including western philosophy in English to students who would become preachers of the Orthodox Church in Amharic. This is paradoxical when viewed in relation to the rich intellectual heritage of the Orthodox Church which has been the center and source of spiritual interpretation and meaning for centuries. Nevertheless, it illustrates the expansion of the Eurocentric view of the world through every system, new or old, since the 20th century in Ethiopia.

It should be acknowledged that there were non-Ethiopian scholars who advocated for the importance of Ethiopian traditional knowledge in the development of education policy. Ernest Work was an American education expert employed by the Emperor to study and recommend an appropriate model of an educational system for Ethiopia. Work had travelled to many parts of Africa and observed how education had been used to impose the European hegemony on colonized people, and was anxious to avoid a similar fate on Ethiopia.

From all sides I was asked what sort of an education system I proposed to suggest – they hoped it would be French or Italian or English, depending upon the one asking. They often suggested it would be American since I came from America. My answer was always that so far as I was concerned it should be neither French, Italian, English, nor American. That I hoped it could be Ethiopian (Work, 1934).

Work's first recommendation was that the national language, Amharic, with proper simplification and enrichment of its alphabet, numerals, and words, should be used as a medium of instruction. Secondly, the content of learning should be Ethiopian. He criticized that the content of textbooks was full of:

Pages about France and Napoleon; Italy and Garibaldi; England and Gladstone but almost nothing about Ethiopia and Menelik and His Majesty their most worthy Emperor. This should not be. Ethiopian boys and girls should be educated in their own language, learn about their own country and men and interesting things, as well as the world in general (1934, p. 67).

Third, Ethiopians should be trained primarily by Ethiopian teachers. To this end, "one of the most pressing and urgent needs is the establishment of the foundation of a University of Ethiopia – the first department of which should be a teachers' training school" (1934, p. 67). Here, Work suggested that, at the beginning, American teachers are best suited to train the future of Ethiopian teachers as Americans are disinterested in "European grabbling rivalry in African land" (1934, p. 67). Finally, he recommended an educational program with fields of study relevant to

the country. He suggested six years of elementary studies for all Ethiopians; followed by specialized school training with agriculture, home making, trade and industry; then five to six years further training for those who wished to pursue a business and professional life and finally a university training of their choice for those who passed through the above and still endeavored to study more. Work's recommendations significantly stressed the importance of Ethiopianizing the education system. He submitted his recommendations but the only suggestion that gained the heed of the Ethiopian government was the recommendation to involve Americans in the founding of a university. The Emperor gave permission and support for the establishment of the University of Haile Selassie I under the management of the Americans (Caulk, 1975).

The above historical examination focused on showing the inherent rift between Ethiopian tradition and Ethiopian education. Starting from its inception, education was separated, even antagonized with tradition. The main reason for this, as explained above, is the ideological commitment of the architects of modern education, both foreign and Ethiopian. They did not take the national ideology and the intellectual legacy of the country seriously. In the way that the colonial structure that transformed the natives' mind was established in Africa by western missionaries and colonial masters (Mudimbe, 1988), in Ethiopia as well, similar structures were built by western missionaries who were supported by native leaders. Under the heavy influence of consciousness of power, institutions were imitated from the West to create the system of Elitdom. The consequence of this tragic development manifested in the activities of the products of the education system, namely the Ethiopian students, which shall be discussed in the next chapter.

Conclusion

The chapter showed the unfolding of massive change in Ethiopian society since the period of Tewodros II. As Joseph Tubiana observed, "The death of Emperor Theodoros [Tewodros] in 1868 marks the end of an important period, a period when Ethiopia could dispense with giving attention to the policy of the European Powers" (1965, p. 164). This study considers the suicide of Tewodros and the burning and looting

of Ethiopian intellectual objects at Meqdalla as a historical event that marked the birth of consciousness of power towards the West. This consciousness gained its ideological and institutional makeup through the creation of imitated institutions and structures from the West. The occurrence of various historical events, especially the consequence of Italian invasion in 1935 and the influence of western countries that aided the restoration of Haile Selassie after World War II, played a significant role in the process of westernization. In any case, the establishment of alien rules and institutions without major conflict and resistance within Ethiopia demonstrated the consequence of the consciousness of power that developed since the historical event at Meqdalla. Further events increased this consciousness.

The establishment of the first public western school occurred in 1908, and a system of power based on European ideals and traditions started to gain momentum through the progressive displacement of the traditional beliefs and cultural legacies of the people. The imitation of western laws was carried out with utter disregard of the established customary and traditional laws of the country. This process became robust, especially after the end of the Italian occupation, when Emperor Haile Selassie allowed the creation of institutions and laws using foreign experts without sufficient regard to their relevance to the Ethiopian tradition and society. Consciousness of power facilitates the irrelevancy of tradition to modernization because it projects the West as an essential model of progress. In this context, the Ethiopian higher education institutions were created with complete dependence on western institutions and experts, and the question of the relevance of the imitated education system to the tradition of the country was not considered. Like anywhere else in colonized Africa, western missionaries and western scholars became the intellectual “fathers” of the Ethiopian education system.

CHAPTER 5

The Rise of Elite Messianism

What the Ethiopian revolution actually entailed was countless repeated uprooting of social relations, in thousands of local communities, in millions of lives (Donham, 1999, p. 35).

Introduction

In the previous two chapters, I followed historical event analysis to highlight how consciousness of power facilitated the development of western institutions in Ethiopia. During the period of Haile Selassie, the ideological and institutional foundations for “modernization” were put in place, and a system of Elitdom eventually took over the rule of the kingdom. This chapter focuses on the consolidation of Elitdom through western knowledge, messianism, and violence. The first section focuses on how western knowledge imparted antagonistic dualism as the basis for the construction of students’ perceptions of social roles and identity in contrast to their tradition and society. Students who acquired western knowledge saw themselves as missionaries of reform who endeavored to guide their society in accordance with western theoretical blue-prints. This is an approach I define as “missionarism.” The second section focuses on how students expressed their role as agents of radical change through political activism and participation in mass education campaigns. I define this process as “messianism.” It involves a strong belief in a single accurate path towards progress, and the necessity to take radical action in order to realize it. Through messianism and to a lesser extent missionarism, the students of 1960s and 1970s became the masterminds of the Ethiopian revolution that overthrew Emperor Haile Selassie I from power on

12 September 1974. The third section will show how the state used violence to crush the messianic role of the students in order to assert itself as the center of national life. The outcome of these three processes, which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter, was the creation of native colonialism through the suppression of tradition as a basis of organizing social and political relationships within the country and the consolidation of Elitdom as the embodiment of knowledge and power driven by political intolerance, suppression of dissent, and monopoly over national resources.

Missionarism as an Effect of Western Knowledge

Historical events in Ethiopia brought about change through the development of a consciousness of power towards the West. However, consciousness of power that leads to change does not emerge only from historical events. Knowledge, which is never neutral or benign, is a key factor in supplying information for new ways of looking at oneself and the world. The introduction of western knowledge to Africa brought with it new types of teachers who referred to the history, tradition, and experience of Europeans to educate Africans. Similar to other African countries, western missionaries in Ethiopia were authorized to establish and manage the Ethiopian higher education system. As the content and method of teaching was imitated from the West, the education system produced a type of identity defined here as missionarism.

The goal of the missionary is to convert others to their way of life, with the converted giving up everything that they have known locally. An example of missionarism could be drawn from the activity of Belgian missionaries in the Congo from which Mudimbe drew three conversion stages (1994). First there is a "referential symbol." The referential symbol "speaks in the name of political power and absolute truth." Second, there is a speech that communicates this with an "edifying style." Although it may refer to a political or religious truth, it "ascribes itself into a style, which makes the speech specific, seducing, and thus spells out its power." Third, there is a process of alienation "where the convert, individually a 'child', assumes the identity of a style imposed upon him or her to the point of displaying it as his or her true nature" (1994, p. 109).

In the case of the Congo, the referential symbol who speaks in the name of absolute truth was the colonizer, in this case a Belgian missionary. In Ethiopia, the founders of the Ethiopian modern school, which included western missionaries, western educated Ethiopians and politicians, established the “modern” school as a referential symbol of western power. By imitating the content, style, language, and administration of the western model, the school facilitated what Kebede called the “be-lated colonisation of Ethiopia” (2008b, p. 45). Thus, the identity of missionaryism could be regarded as a style of knowledge that was obtained from the school, which imparts an identity upon students, a style that the converted considered was “an expression of his or her true nature” (Mudimbe, 1994, p. 109). Through missionaryism, students were regarded as change agents who would be sent out as colonial missionaries to free their own people from the bondage of backward customs. This was done despite their age and lack of experience, which would make them ineligible for social leadership according to Ethiopian tradition.

The above approach considers missionaryism as a socio-cultural practice inherited from western missionaries and transformed into belief in the leadership qualities of western educated intellectuals to change the backwardness of their country. This belief confers upon students not just the position of intellectual superiority in society but, more importantly, it leads them to internalize an identity of being a missionary of change. Western educated Ethiopians were and still are considered as intellectual missionaries, and the Ethiopian tradition is regarded as an empty space for the execution of their mission. This attitude among intellectuals and students exists today, especially in how they see their fellow countrymen and their culture.

Missionarism involves the acquisition of a wide range of ideas from the western school in the country. These ideas create impressions and opinions that are forwarded to interpret the social, economic and political life of the country. Although every idea of missionaryism cannot be regarded as antithetical to the Ethiopian tradition, there are important ways through which it contributes to the dissipation of tradition. First, due to the western content of the curriculum, foreign teachers and the use of English as a medium of instruction, students obtain superficial knowledge about the history of their country and the concern of their people. This lack of accurate and deep knowledge about their country

and society reduces the opportunity to make education a concerted effort to utilize tradition as an engine of progress.

Second, western knowledge has the epistemological drive towards the bifurcation of reality into opposite polarities. It divides the social world between urban and rural, modern and traditional, literate and illiterate, intellectual and ignorant, and so on. This process of antagonistic bifurcation is essential for the creation of the missionary identity of the student, whose role is to help the local people “jump” from the second to the first set of categories. This role situates the educated individual as an autonomous source of meaning whose intellectual authority is free from validation and censorship by the standards of local tradition. Here, antagonistic bifurcation should be separated from the mere apprehension of dual characteristics in a given reality.

The Ethiopian conception of dualism precludes absolute separation between opposite categories. Instead, it emphasizes the existence of a central position towards which the opposite qualities of good and evil could be mediated and reconciled. However, antagonistic dualism presupposes the existence of an individual whose function requires the existence of opposite qualities in any given reality. As a value oriented approach, the worth of a given reality, or an aspect of it, is determined in relation to the individual's interest in or value of the subject matter concerned. The individual draws opposite attributes from a given reality and determines what action should be taken to enforce the favored quality over the disfavored one. The magnitude of the seriousness of the action one may take in a context defined through antagonistic bifurcation depends on the level of contradiction one draws between the opposite coordinates of the perceived reality.

Third, antagonistic bifurcation starts as a social practice in the school where education is usually understood as a composite of dual persons, i.e., the teacher and the student. These two persons represent two cultures, i.e., Europe and Ethiopia. There is a parallel perception of authority and power that mediates the relationship between the teacher and the student. As can be inferred from the tacit recognition of social roles by students and teachers, the teacher imparts knowledge, evaluates, corrects and advises, while the student subjects him/herself to the lectures, evaluations and orders of the teacher. Knowledge and ignorance are constructed on opposite spaces occupying the respective minds of the teacher and

the student, with knowledge understood as coming from the West and ignorance coming from Ethiopia. The teaching process “reveals” the backwardness of local traditions to the student, while simultaneously obscuring its own construction and Eurocentric basis. The significance of western knowledge is valued through the devaluation of Ethiopian traditions.

Fourth, missionaryism undermines the accountability of the individual to the values and beliefs of the people. Ethiopian traditional scholars such as monks and *dabtaras* enjoyed enormous respect from the people, not only due to their knowledge but also their character (Kaplan, 1984). In order to maintain their status as leaders of the people, they had to distribute the privilege that their status had brought them through service and voluntary renouncement of pleasure and comfort. In other words, their status depended on the continuation of their devotion to spiritual life; they had to be found worthy of being privileged. Missionarism undermines the social accountability of the intellectual to the moral expectation of the people. Western educated Ethiopians gained the privilege and status of being learned leaders of the people primarily from the state. They were given offices to decide on important societal issues, and state institutions and dignitaries expressed the significance of their education to the country’s future. Unlike the traditional scholars, their personal lifestyle and character became irrelevant to the traditional precepts of the people. They could accumulate the privilege of being a learned person, in terms of social position and material reward, without the responsibility to distribute it according to the traditional expectations of the people. The state that provides them their education and work could dismiss them or promote them depending on whether they continued to serve its interests or not. Thus, missionaryism is characterized by a disconnection between the character of the educated and the traditional values of the place they belonged to. It renders the traditional relationship between authority and responsibility dysfunctional. Under missionaryism, the traditional privilege of gaining status in order to serve the people changes to the modern privilege of gaining reward in order to serve the state. This in turn made the state less dependent on the traditional relationships between the leaders and the people. The traditional networks and tributaries of power that nurtured the existence and functioning of the state are replaced by normative laws to which the educated become agents of implementation.

These points show the general effects of western knowledge as expressed through the identity of missionaryism among Ethiopian students. Missionarism accommodates the possibilities of reforming existing traditions using western knowledge. It could allow local knowledge to be incorporated as an ingredient of a change process. However, it is violent against tradition as it is guided by a foreign epistemology that does not recognize the inherent validity of indigenous knowledge. It can also make one receptive to a more radical approach against tradition. The radicalized version of missionaryism is what I define as messianism.

The Development of Student Messianism

Messianism is a radicalized version of missionaryism that incorporates an urgent desire and commitment to change existing systems and practices. It is often motivated by a vision of a just society and the reality of unjust rule. Dissatisfaction with social, economic and political conditions, and the desire to change them, requires not just the removal of existing systems but also an idea of a substitution. The substitution, however abstract and vague, creates a burning desire to move into the imagined future. Eric Hoffer's true believers are determined to bring change not because they despise what existed and feel empowered to destroy it, but because they have a fanatical faith in a holy cause that lies ahead (1951). Hoffer argued that once an "extravagant hope" is preached, "the hopeful can draw strength from the most ridiculous sources of power – a slogan, a word, a button" (1951, p. 9). Ethiopian students of the 1960s enacted a new identity that made them passionate missionaries of change because they believed in an idea of a substitution, which was socialism. Their idea of socialism was propagated by a group of radicalized students who called themselves the Crocodile Society (Zewde, 2010, p. 14). But, how did the discourse of a small group gain a tremendous amount of support among students? Why is radicalism perceived as a chosen path towards political change?

Student activism in Ethiopia took place under a political context that was favorable to western ideas. During Haile Selassie, when the government imitated the laws and systems of the West, the students formed their own institutions to develop and express their opinions. While the government aimed at using western ideas to maintain its rule, the

students aimed at applying them to destroy the system. The students were allowed to have student publications, student unions, debating societies, and various clubs and associations, all of which become increasingly radical. The development of student messianism during this period can be seen in two stages.

The first stage is the selective imitation of western ideas that are antagonistic to local customs and practices. This involves appropriating terms from imported ideologies to name political actors and activities in the country. Through the study of their lessons and peer and group interactions, students appropriated words that expressed radical political ideas. For instance, Ethiopian students and several scholars borrowed from Marxist and liberal thought words such as “feudalism” and “class” to conceptualize the Ethiopian traditional political and economic system before 1974 (Crummey, 1980). They also appropriated from the same sources words and concepts to heighten the political differences that they had with each other. For instance, almost all political parties that were active during the 1970s claimed they were Marxists-Leninists. Reading from a single source, citing from same philosophers, newly formed parties waged violent clashes against each other and remained divided. Ottaway’s observations on the post-1974 debates between the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Party and the All Ethiopians Socialist Party provide an illustrative example (1978). The former called the latter traitors, and the latter called the former anarchists. Ethiopian political figures of the past hardly became sources of inspiration for the students’ activism. Instead, names such as Ho Chi Minh, Che Guevara, V.I. Lenin, and Mao Zedong became eternal heroes. The political leaders of the past were portrayed as mere “reactionaries” or “feudal lords who used to suck the blood of the poor,” not as “founding fathers” or guardians of Ethiopia’s independence, except when such reference would benefit the propaganda of the political elites. Alem Kebede noted that the intellectuals applied “retroactive” framing to reframe the past and the present, and “projective” framing to portray a blissful forthcoming in the future (2010, pp. 311-312).

Second, the messianic role of the students was expressed through various actions that they took to remove Haile Selassie’s government from power. The first student protest against authority occurred when university students participated in the *coup d’état* of 1960 against Haile Selassie, at a time when “they neither knew what a *coup d’état* was or how to

mount a demonstration" (Balsvik, 2007, p. 11). They drafted a manifesto which asserted that Ethiopia's backwardness was due to the refusal of the government to allow the "newly educated to modernise the country." Accordingly, "the manifesto placed the students and their successors at the epicentre of Ethiopian politics" (2007, p. 12). The Crocodile Society was created to propagate radical Marxist-Leninist ideas among university students. On February 1965, the students staged a demonstration under the slogan, "Land to the Tiller." The agitation of the students started to infiltrate into the urban population at a time of general economic crisis. Through what is commonly known as the Ethiopian Student Movement, students became the intellectual leaders of the 1974 revolution that removed Haile Selassie from power. Wagaw argues that had it not been for the political activism of the Ethiopian students, the revolution that allowed the Derg to take power from the Emperor would not have occurred in 1974 (1990, p. 203).

Another important consequence of the messianic role of the students is the invention of ethnic differences as a basis of political struggle and association. Generally in Africa, ethnic consciousness is the product of colonialism especially the British divide-and-rule policy, and has been nurtured since then by political elites of the postcolonial period (Vail, 1989). Western educated Africans are at the forefront of using ethnic identity as a raw material to construct their own political power bases. In Ethiopia too, the use of ethnic identity as a political ideology emerged without a clear historical precedent. Previous uprisings that took place in Tigray, Bale, and Gojam provinces were motivated by the maintenance of traditional power interests or economic issues within the Ethiopian Empire (Zewde, 2010). It was on 17 November 1969 that a student by the name Waleligne Mekonen presented a paper that became a canonical manifesto for subsequent ethno-nationalist forces. According to Bahru Zewde, Waleligne argued for two important points (2010). First, Ethiopia is not one nation composed of several ethnics or tribes. It is a collection of nations that have distinct linguistic and cultural features. However, these nations have been oppressed by the Amhara-Tigre group, and they should have the right to self-determination up to secession. Second, the oppression of these nations constituted the national question in Ethiopia. It could be achieved *only through violence* or a revolutionary armed struggle. The historian Bahru Zewde, a fourth year student at that

time, remembered that Walelign's paper "came like a bolt from the blue" (2010, p. 199). It set a fervent debate that developed into a canonical guidance for the struggle of ethno-nationalist forces who later divided the country into ethnic regions with the right to self-determination up to secession. Setting aside the controversy on the merit of ethnic federalism in the country, it is clear that the concept was first invented in Ethiopia as a political ideology by the radical Ethiopian students who religiously believed in the application of the Marxist-Leninist formulae. Although the ethno-nationalist formula did not become popular until the elimination of most nationalist forces during the Derg period, the encapsulation of elite political groups with versions of Marxist-Leninist ideology was unquestionable:

Lenin, and even more so Stalin, provided ready-made formulae to solve the 'national question'; Mao provided the manual for protracted guerrilla warfare. Thus, Marxism-Leninism became a dogma that could interpret the Ethiopian reality, not a theory that could be deployed intelligently to analyze it. On the soil of Christian Orthodoxy were sown the seeds of Marxist orthodoxy (Zewde, 2010, p. 271).

The Derg is the common name used to represent the Coordinating Committee of the Armed Forces, Police, and Territorial Army that ruled over the country from 1974 to 1987. Although it had no political program of its own, it adopted the popular slogans of the students, including "Land to the Tiller" (M. Kebede, 2003b, pp. 179-180). The Derg intensified the violence against traditions in the process of consolidating its power. This can be demonstrated by considering three complementary projects. These include campaign, organization, and violence. Campaign was intended to spread the message of the revolution to the majority of the people with the aim of gaining the best possible support from the population. Organization was a project of incorporating the people into specific power positions within the new system by inventing new modes of relationships or networks of power. The use of violence crystallized the new power relationships created through the two aforementioned processes by eliminating actual and suspected threats of the regime. Students were active participants as protestors, campaigners, organizers and, later, victims of the political change they initiated. The perpetration of violence radically

ruptured not just the traditional modes of relationships people had with each other, but also the possibility of establishing a stable center of relationships. In the following section, I will present the Red Terror and the students' participation in campaigns as turning points that cast the state as the supreme messianic institution in the country, thereby undermining the role of the students.

Campaign

One of the common justifications about the value of education is change. Through the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Universal Primary Education has been hailed as a universal human right and a development prerequisite to change the condition of impoverished societies. In Africa, the colonial administrators and western missionaries expanded primary education among their subjects and converts. Bertrand Russell argued that universal education was initiated due to the feeling that "an ignorant population is a disgrace to a civilised life" (2004, p. 158). "The feeling that illiteracy was disgraceful" entails a cultural initiative (2004, p. 158). In Ethiopia, since the advent of consciousness of power in the late 19th century, the rural population has been considered illiterate. The definition of illiteracy is not simply the inability to write and read. The term depicts the entire mode of life in the rural area as primitive. The initiative against illiteracy has been considered the most venerated act, often lodged in the form of literacy campaigns. But, the greatness of such campaigns is often drawn from the perceived backwardness of the rural people.

During my field work in 2011-12 in Ethiopia, I met teachers who were participants in the literacy campaign during the previous government. They believe that the campaign against illiteracy was one of the best achievements of the Derg. They even consider that it is the best lesson that the current government should consider repeating from the Derg's campaign. They are genuinely concerned by the unwillingness of graduates to educate and civilise the people in rural areas:

These days, students are not willing to go to the rural areas to teach the people. How can our country develop unless intellectuals go to the people and teach them how to read and write? The world is globalizing but

our people are still living in the Stone Age because we could not carry out our historic responsibilities (Interview, 26 April, 2012).

Their common perception of progress suggests a linear pathway of technological advancement where those at the front lead those behind. This theory presupposes the existence of a higher intellectual and cultural standard among developed western societies, and places the destiny of the led in the vision of the leaders. The theory works at a local level by putting the urban and schooled ahead of the rural peasants. The perception of rural life as backward is the most taken for granted belief. “Rural people are backward because they are poor and uneducated, that is as clear as day light” (Interview, 28 April, 2012). All traditional beliefs about nature and society not referenced from the texts of the students’ books, or supported by the urban culture, are considered irrational. A university student gave me a clear example of how students view themselves in relation to their people:

We are the eyes of the people. A blind person, irrespective of age or knowledge needs an eyed person to lead him the way. In Ethiopia, we have a proverb which says, ‘if the blind leads the blind, both would fall into a ditch’. Therefore, only the educated who have the sight of knowledge should lead the people, who are blind due to long years of illiteracy, exploitation and backwardness (Interview, 22 April, 2012).

This general sense of missionarism students feel towards their society was operationalized in various messianic initiatives that were undertaken in social, cultural, and political fields during the Derg regime. Their initiative to teach literacy and numeracy to the rural population through a “warlike” campaign, their effort to discourage aspects of traditional beliefs and practices, and their instrumental role in reorganizing the rural population along socialist lines reflect the internalization of the messianic identity. Akilu Habte, reflecting on the spirit of the Ethiopian Student Movement, noted that:

The students thought they knew everything. They thought they knew... how to run a government, how to teach at a university, how to be a president of a university, a minister of education, an administrator. They knew it all. The consequence was disaster (2010).

The teaching and reorganizing of the rural population was animated by a cultural reengineering that supported the consolidation of Elitdom while undermining the traditional relationships and values of the population. Two campaigns could be taken as an example to show the relationship between teaching literacy and the strengthening of Elitdom. The first is the *Yemisirache Dimtse Literacy Campaign*, which was mentioned in Chapter 4. The second is *Zemecha*, the Development through Cooperation, Enlightenment and Work Campaign, and was the most influential initiative on the broader population.

Milkias noted that the word “*Zemecha* means war mobilization against the enemy; a total mobilization against a total enemy. It implies total commitment and participation and ends by total success or failure” (1980, p. 54). Immediately after the removal of Haile Selassie from power, the students requested that the government interrupt their studies so that they could be sent out to the countryside to teach the rural people about the revolution. The Derg took the opportunity to control and manage the activity of the students. The students were organized, given uniforms, and sent to the rural population as army crusaders or torch bearers to spread the news of the revolution and bring enlightenment and civilization to the broad masses of the rural people. The situation of the rural people was presented as “life behind the dark curtains of illiteracy and in the chain of poverty” (1980, p. 77). Kebede likens this military oriented program to a “colonial enterprise” (2008b, p. 91). About 60,000 university students and teachers, with about 50,000 secondary school students, were sent out to 437 rural places to liberate the masses from oppressive ideas and prepare them to embrace the philosophy of “*Ethiopia Tikdem*,” which means “Ethiopia First.” For the government, this motto aimed at “removing elements of traditional political identity, such as adherence to Orthodox Christianity, which prevented it from serving as a fully national symbol” (Clapham, 1989, p. 12). The students were to teach self-confidence, self-reliance, dignity of labor, and moral regeneration. They were also to explain to the people that “the millennium-old Ethiopian feudal tradition of drunkenness, debauchery, overindulgence, partiality and dishonesty are characteristics of decadence” (P Milkias, 1980, p. 55). Another objective was to “collect and document national folklore and promote the study of regional cultures” (1980, p. 55). However, this latter objective was effectively undermined by authorities who were not interested in it.

Asgedom noted that this denied the gathering of a possible bank of traditional ideas that could have been saved for succeeding generations (2007).

The *Zemecha* was accompanied with various slogans that reflect the students' messianic position and passion to participate in "healing" the nation from the ravages of hunger and "enable the people to stand on their own feet" (P Milkias, 1980, p. 55). Some of the slogans were:

We pledge to eradicate illiteracy by teaching and learning!
Let the educated teach and the uneducated learn!
Age is no barrier to education!
Literacy is part and parcel of the Cultural Revolution!
The curtain of ignorance will be torn asunder!

Although there was a great deal of mobilization, as it were the students themselves who requested to interrupt their classes and be sent out to the rural people to teach, the Derg turned the voluntary request of the students into a law. On 21 December 1974, the *Zemecha* was promulgated in the official newspaper of the government as an obligatory mission of all educated Ethiopians with severe sanctions against those who might defect from fulfilling their responsibilities. The proclamation provided:

Any person who is obligated to participate in the campaign shall as long as he fails to fulfil his campaign obligation, not be permitted; (1) to attend day or night school in Ethiopia; (2) to be employed in any government or private organisation; and (3) to leave Ethiopia whatsoever (Negarit Gazeta, 1977, p. 44).

The proclamation shows that the government expropriated the messianic position of the students. It twisted the desire of the students to play a decisive role in the life of their people to serve its own purpose. The obvious motive was to diffuse political opposition against its ambition to stay in power but the new campaign law had various social and cultural repercussions. High school children from the age of sixteen and above were declared teachers in a cultural context where teachers are viewed as leaders. The students became civilizers, opinion makers and advisors to the rural population. What is significant at this stage is again the purpose for which law was used to intensify government control over life. By

appropriating the slogan of the students and subjecting their initiative to the terms and conditions of its law, the Derg appropriated the process, purpose and outcome of their movement. It claimed ownership over it, and ultimately took whatever credit could come out of the campaign while assigning letdowns to the “immaturity” of the students. The ultimate goal of the campaign was the subjection of both the students and the rural people to its power.

The proclamation stated that those who attended modern schools were obligated to be the teachers, civilizers, and leaders of the people or their status as citizens would be revoked. They could not be students, employees or even migrants without undertaking that role. Although the campaign was initially for one year, it was extended by another year in 1975 (P Milkias, 1980). In the field, the campaigners were to teach the people who their enemies were, to assist in the confiscation of land from traditional landlords, and to organize the people for land distribution. The two most important objectives that might have induced students to implement the *Zemecha* were their zeal to realize their long awaited slogan “land to the tiller,” and a commitment to the establishment of civilian government that would replace the Provisional Military Committee (Derg). While the former objective was more or less realized, the second was not.

The proclamation that designated the students as leaders disregarded the culture of the people. The measure of advancement, of right and wrong, was bent to the students’ understanding, who believed in their own role as revealers of a new knowledge. Traditional beliefs and practices were regarded only through shallow materialism that rejected aspects of the spiritual and cultural life of the people as irrational and superstitious. The role of the students served to institutionalize the radical and ongoing negation of traditions that became the moral justification of the socialist philosophy that the military government claimed to follow.

During the *Zemecha*, the students took with themselves a vague idea of Marxism-Leninism with a highly antagonistic and bifurcating language. It was noted that “students carrying Mao’s little red book, would lecture peasants on class struggle and the necessity of collective farming, while the peasant association leaders kept asking where they would get the oxen urgently needed for plowing and when fertilizer would be delivered” (Donham, 1999, p. 12). One of the most bifurcating concepts that

students introduced into the rural areas was the division between classes. They introduced a polarized and irreconcilable opposition between the majority of the peasants as oppressed, and their traditional leaders of the old system, often known as *balabat* and *chika shum*, as the oppressors. This class division was amorphous, contextually irrelevant, and largely incomprehensible to the people. Farming retainers, blacksmiths and laborers were often categorized as belonging to the class of the oppressed. The class of the oppressors, on the other hand, contained not just the political appointees of the old system, but any one exercising some form of political or cultural authority in the community, such as traditional chiefs, or persons referred to as sorcerers and witches. According to Donham, who conducted an ethnographic study of Malee, Southern Ethiopia, at that time, “belief in caste, to the students, was not just a superstition, it was anti-revolutionary” (1999, p. 50). The students characterized the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed as being exploitative, immoral, and counter revolutionary. People were told to recognize one another as either comrades or enemies. Once a strict dichotomy was drawn between the former leaders and the rest, and the relationship between the two was defined as one of constant confrontation and struggle, the remedy suggested by the *Zemecha* was the victory of the oppressed masses over the grave of the feudal lords. It was reported that through their teachings, the students would incite the people to take every measure against their oppressors. According to Donham the students would ask the people who their real enemies were, and proceed to give the answer:

Your real enemies are the kati and the goda [these were the Malee words that the local Christian translator used for the *Zemecha* students’ Amharic reference to *balabat* and *chika shum*]. If they try to take money from you, you catch them and bring them to the police. If they resist, then kill them (qtd. in 1999, p. 46).

Balsvik also noted that the students participated in the confiscation of grain from former leaders and its distribution to the people (2007). In their bid to convert the people to the ideology of Marxism-Leninism, the students found crusading allies from protestant missionaries, especially in the South. Balsvik reported that “the students and the protestant Christians could in particular put up a united front of condemnation and

disregard towards the traditional world view of the local people, which upheld local chiefs” (2007, p. 63). According to Ottaway:

There was considerable backlash among the peasants against the students, who were trying to move too fast. Ethiopia had to become China immediately; they had little concept of the real speed with which new institutions has been formed in other countries. ... They had little understanding of and respect for the values of the peasants they were working with. There was a revealing incident in which some students desecrated the religious symbol of a community in the South-West and were killed by peasants (1977, p. 86).

An example of such a denigrating attitude towards local belief was reflected in Keffa, Southern Ethiopia, where *Zemacha* students tried to demonstrate the “reactionary” practice of a local spiritual leader. Once they entered his secluded compound and feasted by the followers of the *geramanja*, “the students deliberately desecrated the *geramanja*’s sacred eating utensils and, after dinner, seated the low-caste *manjo* on his special horse” (qtd. in Donham, 1999, p. 35). The outraged followers of the *geramanja* waited until the students had assembled in a school building in the neighborhood. The building was surrounded and torched. According to reports, which could not be cross-checked, all the students died in the blaze or were shot as they fled (Donham, 1999).

Such opposition to the acts of the students, however, was not common. In many places, the students acted against tradition with impunity. It should be stressed, though, that the action of the students was not motivated by total disrespect to the people’s beliefs. The students believed they were liberating the people from the incarcerating effect of superstitious beliefs and from the exploitation of their produce by witchcraft and sorcerers. They were attempting to enlighten them to take their own destiny into their own hands, not to rely on anything, even God, but on the revolution that would lead them to communism, to the true heaven on earth. Thus, it is possible to consider the action of the students as a religious mission (M. Kebede, 2008b). As Habte noted, in Ethiopia, Marxism Leninism was presented “almost as a religion... If you had a different idea you are the enemy” (2010). De Waal noted that people were “forced at gunpoint to attend literacy classes and public meetings” (1991,

p. 317). Party members of the Derg were prohibited from baptizing their children or practicing religion. Through the materialist philosophy of Marxism-Leninism, the traditional religious conception of utopia as afterlife was cast as being possible on earth through absolute submission to communism.

Two conclusions can be drawn from the campaign. First, it laid down a rule that reverberated to the remote corners of the country. That rule was the acceptance of western educated elites as the new leaders of the people and, by virtue of its power to educate and give office to the learned, the government indirectly presented itself as the moral, spiritual, and cultural center of the people. Second, it introduced an institutionalized bifurcated view of the social world to the rural population using antagonistic terms such as feudals versus tenants, reactionaries versus revolutionaries, and oppressors versus the oppressed. The institutionalization of this division was intensified through what was known as the organization of the masses.

Organization of the Masses

Besides teaching the population about Marxism-Leninism, the organization of the masses was another important role carried out by the students. Between 1974 and 1976, "over 20,000 peasant associations, with total membership of 5 million members were established" (Abate & Kiros, 2011, p. 161). The new system was able to plant its roots deep into the rural villages by using the students to organize the population. The most important units of organization were the *kebeles*. As local administrative units constituting villages or neighbors in a proximate geographical area, the *kebeles* played a key role of becoming an institutional organ of the government at the rural and urban areas. Once established, *kebeles* created the Association of Rural Dwellers in the rural areas, and the Association of Urban Dwellers in urban areas. They also established workers', women's, and youth's associations. The rural *kebele* associations became instrumental in carrying out the various programs of the government, including the distribution of land and the implementation of a villagization program where scattered homesteads were made to form larger villages. They also executed the resettlement programs of the Derg, where poor or landless farmers were forced to settle on regions with sparse population

density often inhospitable and far from public services. They also recruited individuals for national military service. The dramatic increase in the participation of the population in the policies of the government was implemented through the *kebeles*. However, the recruitment of the *kebeles'* leaders was imposed from above with "rubber-stamping participation" (Tiruneh, 1993, p. 12). Although the students were not direct participants in the activities of the *kebeles*, they took part in organizing them and teaching their ideologies to them.

The *kebeles* served the most important role of consolidating and sustaining the regime. Another function of the *kebeles* was their role in increasing the capacity of the government to extract revenue and control the economy. The *kebeles* were able to collect taxes and impose quotas of grains upon the farmers to be sold at fixed prices to the government. The principles with which the *kebeles* carried out their functions were influenced by the ideology of the state that rejected the cultural and religious practices and beliefs of the people (Clapham, 1989, pp. 7-8).

One of the main organizing principles of the government was blind obedience to the revolution, according to the nomenclature of the Derg, Revolutionary-Centrism (*abiyotawi maekelwinet*). Opposition to authority was considered a serious contempt against the spirit of the revolution. As an elementary student, I remember the time when we were recruited by *kebele* officials to practice singing and marching to "celebrate" the anniversary of the dethronement of Haile Selassie. The preparation took place at a local *kebele* hall, and it was always preceded with lectures about Marxism-Leninism, an idea that was incomprehensible to me and my friends. In the small town where I grew up, the view of party officials was the most dramatic and fearful event of all. I have a memory of the District Workers Party Secretariat and his followers, in their tight khaki uniforms, walking along the roads guarded by armed militia. For me and my friends, fear was the only means by which we could relate to those officials.

More than the actions, the process through which the *kebeles* implemented their actions defined the nature of politics for the majority. Corruption was rampant and poor individuals were subjected to forced recruitment to the military. Those who had some level of family ties were able to pay the *kebele* officials and save their relatives and/or produce. New codes of relationships were established as people made every effort

to survive. As Donham observes, “with the expansion of state power after the revolution, giving gifts to revolutionary officials had been extended on a scale unknown under Haile Selassie. Such gifts were more than illicit transactions: They constituted obedience and obeisance to the revolution” (1999, p. xxiii). He added,

People did not know if it was possible to trust anyone, to believe in anything, their moral codes, their sacred customs, generally their way of life was revoked without any sensible replacement. What follows was a blind acceptance of everything that was handed down from the authorities (1999).

This shows that the creation and organization of local structures through the active participation of the Ethiopian students took place as a form of violence against traditions; it facilitated conditions for the government to invalidate and exclude the sanctity of tradition, and replace it with a system through which elite power could be exercised.

Physical Violence

The single most important factor that seriously impacted the Ethiopian perception of politics was the practice of state violence against the civilian population. Mbembe noted that the post-colonial state in Africa is marked by the institutionalization of violence (2001). This is also true in Ethiopia, despite it being a country that cannot be called a post-colonial state due to the absence of an accepted foreign rule in its history. Like the colonial period, government institutions served to implement some form of violence by the state. The violence had its own stage, morbid methods of performance, and effect that made it enduring in the consciousness of people.

We can see two modes of expression for violence: verbal and physical. Initially, there was what was called verbal violence, a fierce debate among intellectuals that included naked insults between contending parties and debating from radical positions drawn from the same Marxist-Leninist ideology. This can be contrasted with the traditional art of *eset ageba*, a form of litigation conducted between parties by the use of metaphors, poems, proverbs, and so on. The expression of insult as a form of violence

was practiced initially by the students. Through their radical publications and speeches, university students used to insult Haile Selassie's officials as thieves, ticks, pigs and so on. Irrespective of its cause, the use of such language by young children against their elders was a clear violation of tradition. It also negated the principle of wisdom as humility. The insult against authority reached its peak when the students cried "Thief! Thief! Thief!" against Haile Selassie when he was moved by the military from the palace without a single gunshot fired by the military (Whitman, 1975). Reflecting on the dishonoring of the Emperor by his own students and later his murder by his own soldiers, Abbink noted that, "If one would pursue a psychoanalytic approach to the problem, one might say that the removal and killing of Haile Selassie in August 1975 was a typical case of "father killing," the result of which were visited on the "children later" (1995, p. 140).

The vocabulary of insult used to draw and characterize opposing views was instrumental for the development of numerous slogans and banners under which the most egregious form of physical violence in the history of the country was committed. "The verbal violence that consumed the debate of the students at the beginning of the 1970s paved the way for the physical violence that occurred around the end of the period" (Zewde, 2008, p. 433).

It is also argued that the verbal violence, the debate and action of the students played a decisive role in the radicalization of the government itself. "Doctrinal consistency" was regarded as the most important expression of commitment to the cause of the revolution (M. Kebede, 2008b, p. 3). As mentioned above, some students supported the Derg hoping that its takeover of power from the Emperor was temporary. However, the military showed no sign of handing over its power. While the students were executing the campaign in rural places, the Derg was consolidating its grip on power. A division then emerged among the students themselves. Those who wanted the immediate establishment of a civilian government came together under the more popular party among the intellectuals called the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP). Those who wanted to give the military more time were organized under the party All Ethiopians Socialist Movement, commonly known as Meison. Both parties comprised the most educated in the country, and became fierce enemies who later ended up being victims of the Red Terror

that consumed the lives of at least 10,000 educated people in the capital alone (De Waal, 1991, p. 101).

The Red Terror: 'Revolution Eats its Own Children'

The Red Terror was a Derg-sponsored killing of political activists, the majority of whom were students suspected of opposing the military government. It can be regarded as an act in which student messianism was replaced by state messianism. Zewde divided the Red Terror into three stages which I draw upon for the analysis (2008, pp. 435-440). The first stage was between September 1976 and February 1977. During this period, EPRP members started to assassinate key government figures and supporters. The government retaliated by killing some EPRP members, and generally gave justification to the public why the measures had to be taken. The second stage was between February and November 1977. The crucial trigger was the coup attempt against the Chairman of the Derg, Mengistu Hailemariam, on 3 February 1977. This period was characterized by search and kill missions (2008). On 17 April 1977, Mengistu appeared at a televised public rally with three bottles allegedly filled with blood. It was said that the three bottles represented the three enemies of the revolution: feudalism, imperialism, and bureaucratic-imperialism. He smashed the bottles on the stage showing to the people that the blood of the reactionaries would be spilled on the streets of the country. The next day, the government newspaper came out with the title, "The Broad Masses of Ethiopia: Your Revolution has been transformed from a Defensive to an Offensive Position" (Addis Zemen, 1977). It was at this stage that the *kebeles* and the associations that were initially organized through the support of student campaigners made a blood pact with the regime. "Revolutionary squads" were recruited from the mass associations of peasants, urban dwellers, and factory workers under the program "the arming of the broad masses" (Tirunch, 1993, p. 208). In addition to the squads, cadres were selected from the military and from political factions that reported to Mengistu. The squads and the cadres were coordinated by a highly trained security force directly commanded from the palace by Mengistu himself. These forces which, according to Tirunch, were the "machinery of death" selected, tortured and killed prominent individuals while encouraging the squads and the

cadres to do the same (1993). The peak of the killings during this period occurred on 1 May 1977.

Ethiopian political parties used International Workers Day as an opportunity to showcase their political stands. On 29 April 1977, EPRP organized a mass rally that led to a disaster. On that day, and throughout half of the month, more than 1000 demonstrators were massacred by government militias, half on the streets and the rest while fleeing or hiding.

School children of eleven years of age and above were at the forefront of EPRP demonstrations. It is widely reported that hospitals often refused to treat the wounded on the grounds that they were reactionaries, and charged anything up to 100 US dollars and 25 US dollars for the release of students' and workers' bodies, respectively, to cover the cost of bullets wasted in killing them (Tiruneh, 1993, p. 211).

What made the period of Red Terror such a gruesome event is not just the severity and brutality of the violence but also the involvement of ordinary persons in the act. The offices of rural *kebeles* and associations were turned into detention centers where the most despicable acts of torture were committed against suspected members and sympathizers of EPRP: "One typical form of torture was soaking the feet of the detainees in boiling water for a time and then suspending them upside-down and beating the soles of their feet until the skin gave way to blood and the raw flesh and finally to the bare bones" (Tiruneh, 1993, p. 212). These torture techniques were largely learned from Soviet and Cuban advisors to the government (Tiruneh, 1993). Many died in the process; others became physically or mentally disabled. The objective of the torture was to force the victims to expose at least three members of the EPRP to the authorities. Out of the severity of the pain, many of them had to incriminate themselves, or innocent persons whom they remembered, or even members of the security forces.

Once the so called members of EPRP were identified through the process of torture and forced incrimination, they would be taken to the outskirts of the cities and executed at day break with gunshots.

Their skulls were smashed open with gun butts, their brains and blood scattered all around and slogans pinned to their bodies, the corpses

would be left lying on strategic street corners till morning for passer-by to see; sometimes corpses were also displayed on television. With this morbid ritual over, the bodies were then collected and buried in mass graves on the outskirts of the cities (Tirunch, 1993, pp. 212-213).

The third stage of the Red Terror took place between November 1977 and May 1978. This time was the period of “*netsa ermija*” which means “unrestricted licence to kill” (Zewde, 2010, p. 439). Terror became a normal duty of revolutionary squads who were authorized to take extraordinary measures against enemies of the revolution. More organized and determined than ever, the Derg expanded the practice of terror. At this stage, the members of Meison who supported the illumination of EPRP during the first and second stage of the Red-Terror themselves became victims of the Derg. By doing so, the government eliminated all organized groups, especially politically active students and graduates, slashing the moral and intellectual pedigree of political leadership to its own size.

Zewde presented two important consequences that resulted from the violent crushing of EPRP and Meison. The first effect was that Mengistu Hailemariam became the center of national life:

After eliminating all of the leftist groupings except his own, *Abiwotawi Saddam* (“Revolutionary Fire”), he declared himself the *ma’ikel* (center) around whom the genuine vanguard party was to be formed...In truth, he became the *ma’ikel*, not only of the party but also of national life in general (2010, p. 442).

As presented in the previous two chapters, this is against the Ethiopian tradition that considered Covenant as the central intersection point for the vertical and horizontal axes of national life. As a consequence of the Red Terror, “a generation of urban people with at least minimum education” was lost (De Waal, 1991, p. 109). As Mengistu occupied the national center, his opponents looked for new centers to organize and challenge the regime. What followed was the decline of multi-nationalist movements and the rise of ethno-nationalist movements among which the current leading coalition of ethnic political parties, Ethiopian Peoples’ Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), became the strongest. Like the Derg, political parties are oriented by Marxist-Leninist elitism and

view the political and cultural legacy of the past through the prism of ethnic oppression and backwardness (M. Kebede, 2003a).

Ethiopia was made and remade for the third time in less than half a century. Before 1974, Haile Selassie was viewed as standing at the center of the nation; from 1974-1991, Mengistu Hailemariam became a national center, and then from 1991-2012 Meles Zenawi was the center of political life. Their style and legacy may not be one and the same. However, their significance as centers of ultimate political power is undeniable. It can be argued that Ethiopia's tragic experience during modern times has been the ascendancy of *one-man-centered* politics backed by western ideas and instruments of power with little or no regard to the role of indigenous traditions. One-man-centered politics entails over-reliance on the power of an individual to deal with all national problems. It has to do with the exaltation of the whim of an individual or group of individuals whose decisions are dictated by their own or their party's power interests rather than the cultural and traditional sensibilities of the population. Although one-man-centered politics may not be new to the country, it became progressively strong since the period of Haile Selassie when the Emperor decided to import western ideas, institutions, experts and instruments of coercion to build a new nation in exclusion of the traditional legacy of the country.

Lessons of Violence

There are three important consequences that emerged out of the Red Terror. The first comes as a result of the involvement of ordinary persons as perpetrators and the victims; the second is the process through which terror was executed and the third is the impact of the violence on society—on the government in general and on students in particular. As stated above, although organized and led by the military, civilians were active participants in the Red Terror. Urban and rural dwellers, workers, professionals, and students organized under various associations were recruited to form death squads in order to eliminate other civilians suspected of being “counter revolutionary.” Large number of hitherto denigrated individuals came to the political scene for the first time as actors to write a story that ultimately was to define who they were as members of a new political community.

The process through which acts of terror was committed revoked some of the fundamental beliefs that ordinary persons held regarding the sanctity of life in their tradition. For example, the violation of burial to the victims was a fundamental blow to the traditional ceremony that was kept for the dead. Such a ceremony allowed strong community involvement as almost every individual belongs to a burial association called *edir*. Through *edir* associations, the dead are mourned in a range of prolonged burial ceremonies such as prayers and remembrance feasts which are important to every family. The common Ethiopian proverb “*kebarie atasatagne*” which means “may I not be in a position where no one would attend my funeral” suggests the sanctity of this ritual. However, what was done to the victims of Red Terror was a flagrant violation of this tradition.

Another impact was the bifurcation of social and political reality in terms of antagonistic forces. The Ethiopian social, political and historical world was perceived as a field of struggle between the uncompromising agents of good and bad political forces. Based on this radicalized view of dissent, a culture of verbal violence and confrontation consumed any political dialogue in the country. This was clearly visible in the 2005 national election where political parties underwent a furious political debate that resulted in the killing of dozens of civilians and the arrest of several political activists (Abbink, 2006).

Conclusion

In the previous chapter, it is shown that the modern school was created as an institution that promotes western epistemology. This epistemology constantly bifurcates social reality into contradictory opposites that dismisses the validity of traditional meanings. In this process, what is considered as Ethiopia’s tradition has been relegated to a state of backwardness that opposes modern progress. I used two terms, missionarism and messianism, to express the top-down pre-emptive initiative of the students to change their society.

Both missionarism and messianism share the command condition of separation from tradition (analyzed as alienation in the coming chapter). In both cases, tradition is to a large extent considered the opposite of modernization. However, while missionarism considers the achievement

of change through the progressive reformation and reformulation of the physical and mental spaces of the people, messianism aims at achieving change through radical political action, including violence against anything that opposes its vision. Ethiopian students were driven towards the latter approach due to their internalization of a western worldview that undermines local knowledge and their dissatisfaction with the then existing traditional system. They produced the slogans, mottos and radical action that they believed was needed to change the country into a socialist nation. They participated in literacy campaigns and spread the “news” of socialism and helped create grassroots rural and urban associations.

This role was later confiscated by the military rulers who took violent measures first against the old system and later against students alleged to have been involved in oppositional activities. The Red Terror shows the end result of radical messianism. The state, by virtue of its monopolistic control over the instruments of coercion, became the only effective messianic institution in the country. The process by which the power of elites has unfolded – antagonistic bifurcation, student and state messianism, and violence – led to the progressive invalidation of traditional values and the institutionalization of the two types of violence that created native colonialism. Epistemic violence against tradition is institutionalized through the education system and other state institutions that operate based on western knowledge and physical violence against dissent become the ultimate means of maintaining Elitdom.

Elitdom and Centeredlessness

Introduction

The traditional education system aimed at using education to enlighten the individual with divine truth and make him/her one with society. Knowledge was considered as a “live coal buried under the ashes of a stove”, a treasure only God could reveal to humans (Wagaw, 1990, p. 38). To seek knowledge was to seek truth. Hence, education was an end; it was desired for its own sake. Similar to the classical education in Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and Buddhism, knowledge was to be pursued through the study of sacred texts and the practice of spiritual life (Spring, 2006, p. 2). Hence, education focused on ethical principles, discouraged individualistic tendencies and promoted relational ideals over self-serving ones.

In Ethiopia, the transition from the traditional education system to the current western model of schooling took place through epistemic violence against traditional knowledge. The imitation of western institutions, especially the western education system after 1941, led to the sidelining of traditional knowledge and traditional scholars, and the rise of western educated individuals as missionaries of modernization. The 1960s witnessed the rise of student messianism that envisioned the violent removal of the monarchical system as a precondition for the realization of socialism in Ethiopia. The military overtook this messianic vision of the students and removed Emperor Haile Selassie from power in 1974. Then, a new power struggle started between student messianism and state messianism, which led to the killing of several thousands of students during the Red Terror. The Red Terror had disproportionate

effect on student messianism as it primarily targeted members of the EPRP who had nationalistic visions and wanted to change the system through urban uprising. It also made state violence the principal means of maintaining power and privilege. Schools became centers of party mobilization; students had to study “revolutionary” songs, attend Marxist-Leninist classes, and were subjected to forced recruitment for national military services. Academic freedom and other political freedoms were more severely restricted than during the period of Haile Selassie. Political party offices were opened in the campuses, exercising effective control over the teaching-learning process. Eventually, members of the academic community became participants by adopting the nomenclature of the political system, and labelling dissenters as “anarchists”, “anti-revolutionaries”, “imperialists” and so on. (Ottaway, 1978, p. 19). Consequently, political mobilization based on nationalistic ideals was subjected to severe scrutiny and criticism, leading to the strengthening of ethnic based liberation fronts, especially in Eritrea and Tigray.

After 17 years of civil war, EPRDF seized political power in 1991 and adopted a constitution that realized the vision of Walelign Mekonen’s manifesto and other ethno-nationalist forces of the Ethiopian Student Movement. Article 8 of the 1995 Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) Constitution declared the sovereignty of “Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia” who aspired to achieve a “common destiny” “by rectifying historically unjust relationships”. The constitution divided the country into nine ethnic regions, recognized the right of nations and nationalities to promote their own identities and to exercise their right to self-determination up to secession (FDRE, 1995, Art.34). It recognized not individuals but the various ethno-linguistic groups as the members of the Ethiopian nation (Nahum, 1997, pp. 51-52). Consequently, Ethiopia is now the only country in the world that allows the self determination of ethnic regions up to the right to secession from the Federation. The historical account in Chapter 5 illustrates that, since 1974, the Ethiopian state was the product of elite messianism. Violence was the principal means of its formation. This chapter analyses the Ethiopian Education and Training Policy (ETP) and the effect of the education system on the lives of high school and university students. Based on empirical research from two high schools and one university it shows how elite autocracy perpetuates itself through violence against tradition.

Critical Analysis of the Ethiopian Education and Training Policy (ETP)

The ETP provides the basic framework for education in Ethiopia (MOE, 1994). It defines education as, “a process by which man transmits his experiences, new findings, and values accumulated over the years, in his struggle for survival and development, through generations” (MOE, 1994). This definition links knowledge and education to the survival ethos of the body, and diminishes the space of recognition for spiritual and aesthetic forms of knowledge, which were prevalent in the traditional school system. Under its objectives, the policy provides the purpose of education with semantic action verbs such as: “to produce”, “to cultivate”, “to develop”, “to bring up”, “to provide”, “to make”, “to create”, “to ensure” and “to diffuse”— suggesting that education produces ‘citizens’ rather than the other way round. Loaded more with political than educational objectives, the approach advocates the revival of the messianic vision of the Ethiopian Student Movement which considered traditional and cultural spaces as the object of its operation. Knowledge is defined as a good that can be stored in and distributed from the premises of the modern school to the mass population. This diffusionist vision of knowledge resembles the “coloniser’s model of the world” (Blaut, 1993). According to Blaut, diffusionism is a myth that considers the West or Europe as a self-generating source for the dissemination of scientific ideas. “In this view, modernity is still a one-way street, or perhaps better, a multi-lane superhighway with only entry ramps” (Clifford, 2004, p. 3). In order to construct such a development superhighway that would swiftly take the country to the level of middle income economies, the policy links western knowledge with state power, and presents three justifications for its subject-creating roles.

First, it historicizes a particular version of the past. It makes no positive reference to the history or culture of the people. Instead, it portrays the past as a legacy of “complex problems the country has plunged in by dictatorial, self-centred and vain regimes” (MOE, 1994, p. 4). Moreover, while it remembers the existence of illiteracy, harmful traditional practices and primitivism that continues to resist the diffusion of science and technology, it makes no positive references to the country’s history. Second, it historicizes the subject. It makes Ethiopian students casualties of the history and culture of the past and it intends to operate at

their cognitive level to reformulate their mental spaces: to make them “differentiate harmful practices from useful ones,...show positive attitude towards development and dissemination of science and technology”, and to make them “citizens with a humane outlook” (MOE, 1994, pp. 7-8). Third, it intends to perform these functions at the individual level. It aims to “cultivate the cognitive, creative and productive potential of citizens”, and “develop the...problem solving capacity of individuals” (MOE, 1994, p. 7). Based on Western dualism, this approach invents antagonistic identities in education and awards moral and intellectual superiority to the teacher and the educated as agents of western civilization. It implies that the school has the power to give a “humane outlook” — the ability to differentiate the harmful from the useful in a society that was plunged into complex problems due to the vain regimes of the past and the vagaries of ignorance and illiteracy (MOE, 1994, p. 6).

Such a reductionist approach to the legacy of tradition portrays a Hegelian view of motionless Africa, a land of childish immaturity that existed “beyond a day of self-conscious history”; a people “enveloped in the dark mantle of night” (Hegel, 1956, p. 91). It resonates with the 18th and 19th century western anthropologists’ view of colonial education policy when the backwardness of Africa was deemed a burden for the enlightened Europe (Lyons, 1970, p. 6). In the same way pre-colonial societies were framed as primitive in order to justify the civilizing mission of Europeans, the policy presents the Ethiopian historical existence and traditional experience as barbaric and backward in order to allow the tyranny of Elitdom. The way the policy aims at structuring and pedagogising education by focusing on primary skills suggests its endorsement of a global hierarchy of labor (Leher, 2004). This hierarchy is also reflected in the choice of a foreign language instead of the national language as a medium of instruction in higher education, which one high school teacher described as “the most pernicious vice to the learning of Ethiopian students” (Interview, June 5, 2013).

The Cult of English as a Medium of Learning

The Ethiopian Constitution presents the use of the mother tongue in education as a newly won right for all ethnic members of the country. However, the Ethiopian Higher Education Proclamation (HPR) provides,

“The medium of instruction in any institution, except possibly in language studies other than the English language, shall be English” (HPR, 2009, Art. 20 (1)). The aim is to achieve international competitiveness in the globalizing world by focusing on the transfer of technology from developed countries. The ETP does not provide a clear justification for the use of English. However, it outlines the existence of three tiers of communication in Ethiopian society. The first is local communication which is based upon the ethnic language of the region where the student lives. All subjects in primary education would be offered using the local language. The second type of communication is national. For this, the child has to study the official language of the country, Amharic, as a subject from year one. At the third level, the policy identifies English as a means of international communication. For this, English should be taught as a subject in primary education, and be used as a medium of instruction for all courses at secondary and higher education levels. The educational advantage of learning using mother-tongue languages at lower levels and European languages at higher levels has been promoted by the World Bank (Lockheed & Verspoor, 1991, p. 167). Criticizing the approach, Mazrui argued that the Bank’s initiative was “a means of facilitating the students’ acquisition of the imperial [European] language at a later stage” (2000, p. 48). He also shows that, at least as far as UNESCO is concerned, the difficulty in using local language as a medium of instruction is where “to find money” (UNESCO qtd. in A. Mazrui, 2000, pp. 50-51). Because of lending and support conditions “under the World-Bank structural adjustment programs, the only path open to African nations is the adoption of the imperial languages from the very outset of a child’s education” (A. Mazrui, 2000, p. 49).

Tekeste Negash strongly argues that the use of English as a medium of instruction is detrimental to the national interest (2010). Ethiopia has instruments of education. The Ge’ez Fidel (Ethiopian alphabets) is one of the ancient languages of the world, has a well-developed philosophy and is a repository of ancient wisdom that should pass on from generations to generations (Bekerie, 1997; E. Isaac, 2007).

The argument in favor of the use of English as a medium of instruction is often based on a myth about the existence of a superior international standard. At the bottom of this myth lies a strong belief about the inferiority of Ethiopian languages and the absence of traditional knowledge

that can contribute to modernization. A supporter of this approach who works for the Ministry of Education argued that:

We do not have national standard different from international standard because our national standard is international standard. We need our students to integrate and compete with other students in the world; we do not want them to be isolated from the world (Interview, June 5, 2012).

There is no clear definition of international standard. Whose standard is considered to be international? How is international standard related to the national interest? Research shows that the use of a global language as a medium of learning in Sub Sahara Africa is a myth that prevents the true benefits of education to Africans (Truong, 2012). During my field work, I asked several teachers and students about the merit of using English as a medium of instruction. Although many of them believed that English is a means of reaching out to the world from where they are isolated due to poverty and backward traditions, one student responded: "Why should we use their [western] language in order to learn from them or compete against them? Can't we think about or do similar stuff without using similar languages?" (Interview, May 10, 2012). Few respondents considered English as a weapon of colonizing the entire workforce and resources of the country in the name of investment through a globalized elite. A high school teacher criticized the use of English:

Our leaders say they are learning from other countries' experiences. Can you mention any successful country that is developed using a foreign language? We are not India or Nigeria. We were not colonized by the British. We did not grow up learning, communicating, writing, speaking, and feeling in English. Our folklores, stories, and beliefs are all in our languages. How can we use the English language to help civilize 90 million people, the majority of which know not a single word of English? Is this nation building? Our language is our experience. How can you share your experience without using the experience? (Interview, May 10, 2012)

My observation of exam preparation by students clearly illustrates the challenge that students face in using English as a medium of learning. Many students study the content of their exercise books using the

method called *shemideda*. This is a form of rote learning, the cramming of every word in a text without necessarily understanding the meaning or the concept behind it. I have met students both in high school and early university who use *shemideda* as their principal method of study. When asked why a student uses *shemideda*, and whether it would be necessary if education was in the national language, a student responded:

The teachers translate for us from English to Amharic during class. Because of that I understand the idea but I cannot yet put it in writing using English. I do not have enough vocabulary to express it in the way I understand it, and I could be grammatically wrong and lose marks if I try to do so. If it were in Amharic, I would not even need a teacher! I could have studied every book sitting under a tree in my village (Interview, May 20, 2012).

English as a challenge to learning could be seen in a cultural context that does not support the use of the language in daily life. A student noted, “There is little incentive or value outside the school that encourages you to speak in English unless you want to show-off as an intellectual” (Interview, May 20, 2012). In high school, many students have to spend an enormous amount of their study time looking for the meanings of several words in their English-Amharic dictionaries, which are full of errors and defects. During my field work, I repeatedly attended classes with students in two public high schools and in Addis Ababa University. The experience of the students in the two high schools is similar. Generally, English is studied not as a means of expressing their ideas or as an instrument of acquiring knowledge as commonly assumed, but as an end for education. The greatest focus on grammatical rules, the vocabularies, the punctuation marks, the pronunciation, and so on, are repeatedly explained in Amharic to the students. Students make every effort to memorize the rules without necessarily applying them in their communications. I observed three groups of students preparing themselves for exams. While working on their English exercises, they discussed every question in Amharic arguing whether it is right to use this English word or that word, this tense or that tense, if it appears in their exams. In their genuine and eager interest to understand it, it is not difficult to notice the distance between the English language as a finished product and the

experience of the students. The language is no way near to be used as a means of expressing their own ideas or receiving others.' It is studied as an idea or new knowledge by itself, using the Amharic language as a medium of learning and communicating it with each other.

The difficulty associated with English is especially visible during class presentations where the embarrassment, the feeling of inadequacy and nervousness that students face hampers their communication. In Grade 11 and 12 English class rooms, I observed many students making class presentations, asking questions, and responding to questions often by complementing their lack of English with Amharic. One of the clear challenges associated with this type of learning is the impossibility of critical learning. The main concern of critical education is to unravel oppressive ideologies that are concealed in the seemingly neutral body of the language and content of education. It is difficult to imagine the possibility of doing this when the language as well as the content of education is presented to the students as a new product. A teacher's comment is relevant here:

I sometimes think, by teaching them [students] western ideas using western language, we are reducing their level of thinking and communication to that of a western child. They may have large experience from life, but we lock their experience by making English the only exit door for it. Throughout their higher education life, they have to struggle looking for the right vocabulary and grammar to express what they knew. They may feel or think about great things, but they can only speak or write so little of it in English (Interview, May, 2012).

The abandonment of Ethiopian languages from higher education and research denies the people the possibility of contributing their experience to enrich the knowledge base, and the possibility of producing and reproducing knowledge relevant to their lives. The progressive abandonment of the national language is even stronger among private primary schools that enforce the use of English with strict disciplinary measures. I was informed by teachers that a few private schools in Addis Ababa prohibit the use of Amharic in the school compound with corporal punishment being applied on students who might break this law. Such local practices, coupled with the interest of the state to facilitate the "internationalization"

of the system using English as an important instrument, may contribute to the “linguistic genocide” some scholars are worried about (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). Instead of teaching English as a foreign language, the system uses it as a language of instruction for all courses in high school and university with the consequence of turning citizens into its own clients.

Quality Education as a Mask to the Question of Relevance

The Ethiopian government under the EPRDF has been successful in galvanizing international support based on its education policy. The World Bank has declared Ethiopia among “good practice” countries in designing quality education projects that would lead to “successful outcomes” (Vawda, Moock, Gittinger, & Patrinos, 2001). According to the World Bank, a “decade after launching its 1994 New Education and Training Policy, Ethiopia’s government can look back with justifiable pride on the progress achieved” (2005, p. xiviii). From primary to university level, new schools and universities have been built, teachers trained, and schools and universities have been opened, but this significant expansion has created a wide-ranging discourse over quality.

The meaning of quality education is often described in terms of five “components [that] are often in tension with each other so that to improve one may have negative effects on another” (Barrett, Chawla-Duggan, Lowe, Nickel, & Ukpo, 2006, p. 12). The five components include effectiveness, efficiency, equality, relevance and sustainability. These elements aim to strengthen the contribution of the education system to the fulfilment of the government’s development plan. The most important aspect of the development plan is “focus on growth with particular emphasis on greater commercialization of agriculture and enhancing private sector development, industry, urban development and scaling up of efforts to achieve Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)” (MoFED, 2010, p. 4). The GTP states the goal of ESDP IV as, “Producing democratic, effective, knowledge based, inspired, innovative citizens who can contribute to the long term vision of making Ethiopia into a Middle Income Economy” (MoFED, 2010, p. 49). It specifically emphasizes the production of a workforce that is demanded by industry, particularly the growing manufacturing industry, and prescribes that universities accept a quota of 70% natural sciences and 30% social sciences students (MoFED,

2010, p. 49). In this context, relevance is regarded as a quality component that ensures the alignment of the education system with the development plan of the state (Barrett, et al., 2006, p. 14). In a country where 85% of the population depends on subsistence agriculture and manufacturing has only a 4% contribution to the economy, the education system is skewed towards producing workers for the urbanized elite class. This approach makes education a means of satisfying the interest of Elitdom.

Quality is claimed to be one of the top priorities of the entire system (MoFED, 2010). Both the government and its donors believe that the major cause of low quality education is the lack of educational technology and resources, something only donors and the state could supply (Yizengaw, 2005, p. 8). This makes cost the most important consideration for quality improvement. As poor communities may not fund adequate resources for schooling, the cost factor subordinates learning to the whims of the market where the alms of the donors and the role of the state is crucial. For instance, the use of local materials to build schools was considered inefficient due to costs (Vawda, et al., 2001). Moreover, policy with due consideration of cost factors has been enforced by the World Bank as a condition for lending for the production of textbooks and other reading materials (World Bank, 2002). Recently, the production of educational materials through international open bidding procedures is being implemented as a progressive step in achieving “international standard”. The government presented this in its quality improvement plan as: “International tenders will be announced for the development, printing and distribution of textbooks and teacher guides conforming to the requirements of the new curriculum” (MOE, 2008, p. 10). Producing textbooks through open bidding allows owners of rich publishing companies to provide books for poor countries’ citizens. Critics argue that this practice was imposed by the World Bank and has been fatal for national publishing, especially in Africa (Brock-Utne, 2000). Moreover, these practices clearly demonstrate the ideological orientation of schooling: education cannot be improved from within; it can only be supplied from outside.

The failure of education is generally attributed to low quality which includes low level of intervention and control by the state. The government’s General Education Quality Assurance Package (GEQAP) or, according to the World Bank, the General Education Quality Improvement

Plan (GEQIP) is a major initiative being undertaken to improve the quality of education from grade 1 to 12. The World Bank has been funding GEQIP in two phases: Phase one constituted \$417.3 million from 2009-2013 (World Bank, 2013a). Phase two is \$550 million from 2014-2018 (World Bank, 2013b). The money is allocated to strengthen the education system by measures such as providing textbooks and other materials, by training teachers, improving school infrastructure and enhancing the management capacity of the system. GEQAP emphasizes increased government control over the quality of education. It prescribes increased government sponsored activities, allowing politicians from regional to local administration offices and from Ministry of Education to local education offices to exercise quality assurance roles (MOE, 2008). Quality is conceptualized as the capacity of the teachers to teach better English, not the relevance of English as a medium of instruction. It relates to the significance of finishing the course syllabus on time, not the significance of the course syllabus itself to the needs of the students. The discourse of quality has entangled teachers and students in a vicious circle of self-disengagement and poor performance. Poor student performance which is manifested through low marks, high absenteeism, and lack of discipline is attributed partly to poor teacher performance which is due to lack of adequate teaching skills and poor infrastructure (MOE, 2010). This approach fastens the students and the teachers alike with the system by relating their performance with internal deficiencies that can be corrected through the quality assurance efforts of the state and its donors. ESDP IV clearly shows this approach as it relates high dropout rates and poor performances of students to poor school infrastructure:

One issue which needs more attention than in previous years is the low quality of school infrastructure, due to a strong reliance on low-cost construction (mainly through community support). This may be one of the factors that explain the low completion rates and the low achievement. More attention will be given for the quality of facilities under ESDP IV (MOE, 2010, pp. 12-13).

While school infrastructure may have a significant contribution to a low quality education, the emphasis on quality masks the fundamental question of the relevance of the system. By conceptualizing the problem of

education with lack of skills and infrastructure which are at the disposal of the state, the education system escapes the question of its own relevance; it makes its own activities more important than ever, such as providing more training for teachers, improving the school infrastructure, and supplying more education resources. In this way the system drives sustenance from its own failures.

Critics argue that the spiral of reforms that Ethiopian authorities are adopting following World Bank advisors have caused significant contradictions and chaos in the teaching-learning process (Tessema, 2006). Among the graduates, a large number of Ethiopian intellectuals leave the country every year (Shinn, 2003). Consequently, it is argued that Ethiopian intellectuals “didn’t contribute an iota to the betterment of life of the toiling mass” (Tolossa, 2007). According to Tekeste Negash, the system of education in Ethiopia is heading from crisis to the brink of collapse (2006). Local Ethiopian policy analysts argue that since the beginning of western education, the Ethiopian state maintained unflinching control over the education system:

Throughout the history of Ethiopia education, what has been consistently missing is the lack of consultation with stakeholders— teachers, students and parents— on the content and nature of education. Despite the rhetoric, the practice has continued to the present day, and the policy formulation process has by and large remained top-down. The government continued to come up with policy statements that surprise teachers, students and parents (Teshome, 2006, p. 64).

Despite the expansion of access to education, the absence of a tangible contribution from the sector is a source of frustration for the majority of Ethiopians whose lives still depend on tradition. The education system distances itself from being the cause of this frustration by abandoning tradition and by denying the needed space for critical dialogue about the relevance of the system.

The Cult of Technology

The ETP envisions education to contribute to two major outcomes. These are work and the use of technology. Education is envisioned to

bring about a “culture of respect for work, positive work habits and a high regard for workmanship” (MOE, 1994). The type of work anticipated is “the growing manufacturing industry”, although the contribution of the manufacturing industry to total GDP is, as previously noted, about 4%. The major type of education designed to meet this objective is technical and vocational training.

The second envisioned outcome for education is the ability to use technology. ETP envisions to achieve “all rounded development by diffusing science and technology into the society” (MOE, 1994). The diffusionist vision considers that “technology will free the people”, and allow “impoverished villages to escape poverty by acquiring the needed technology” (Krishna, 2003). The use of satellite television (plasma) for academic instruction is being used as an example of harnessing the power of technology for education. Satellite television is used to broadcast lectures directly from South Africa, or via recorded DVDs from South Africa and centrally transmitted from Addis Ababa on all major subjects such as Mathematics, English, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, and Civics. The rationale behind the use of such technology is based on equity and efficiency: All students will enjoy uniform learning opportunities, and the quality of the standard of their learning would become international. The idea is reminiscent of the country’s involvement in the failed *one-laptop-for-one-child* project, whereby providing tablets not teachers would magically resolve the learning need of children in poor countries (Kraemer, Dedrick, & Sharma, 2009). The government’s shortcut strategy to an “international standard” has resulted in an enormous failure. This can be seen in the poor level of performance of students with plasma as compared to private schools who do not use plasma (Bitew, 2008), the significant reduction of interaction between teachers and students in the classroom, the frequent power cuts that disrupt transmissions, the difficulty of understanding the English language spoken by foreign lecturers, and the transmission of culturally inappropriate content (Lemma, 2006). A study conducted on the de-skilling impact of this teaching method on teachers noted the following:

This is a debilitating phenomenon in which teachers have been losing control of their practice. Teachers have become simple technicians who look into smooth broadcasts or transmissions of TV programmes. ...

Teachers do not plan and execute what they plan. They are mere TV operators. They are simply executioners of what others planned or wanted to happen in the classroom (Tessema, 2006).

The power of technology to bring change has been narrowly defined as the simple ability to operate technological equipment such as a television without having the power to contribute to, or influence, the content and process of learning. By making technology an innocent antidote for backwardness, the providers determine the meaning of quality to what they can safely provide rather than to what the receivers need. The use of foreign lecturers to teach Ethiopian students using a state-of-the-art technology, such as satellite television, without effective local interaction revives the uprooting effect of Ethiopian education. It portrays a nation without center, without a special message to pass on to the next generation; and a society that needs to tread behind others, copying and consuming what others are producing. Technology is presented as a finished product that can only be bought from developed societies, and education is regarded as the means by which Ethiopians could be integrated into the consumption stage of technological production.

The diffusion of technology to rural places using education could be related to the World Bank's rationale for the expansion of primary education among Ethiopian farmers. A study conducted by the Bank on Education in Ethiopia suggests that literate farmers are more productive than illiterate farmers because each additional year of primary schooling increased the use of fertilizer (World Bank, 2005, pp. 187-188). The study argues that had appropriate technology been used, agricultural productivity in Ethiopia could have increased by 50% (World Bank, 2005, p. 185). Comparing the level of schooling to the rate of fertilizer use, the study shows that farmers with 1 to 4 years of schooling could use 72% more fertilizer than illiterate farmers (World Bank, 2005, p. 188). Based on this promising prophesy and other considerations such as the positive correlation between income and schooling, nutrition and schooling, and the negative correlation between fertility and schooling, the Bank urges Ethiopia to focus on expanding primary education: "universalizing at least four years of schooling as soon as possible, which serves both economic and social goals, while expanding the other levels more slowly" (World Bank, 2005, p. 181).

There is a similarity between the strategy to increase the ability of farmers to use fertilizers on the one hand and the students to learn through satellite television on the other. In both cases, the product is imported from outside the country without the participation of the alleged beneficiaries. All students receive similar plasma lessons, and all farmers buy similar fertilizers. Desalegne Rahmato noted that “the strategy for agricultural development relies heavily on one formula: the provision of a package of modern technologies and the technical and human resource arrangement for providing the service” (2009, p. 147). In this “top-down and undemocratic approach”, similar agro-chemicals and improved seeds are distributed without the due consideration of ecological and agro-nomical variations (2009, p. 147). “Farmers in effect had no choice, nor did they have a say in the selection of the technologies they were offered” (2009, p. 147).

In summary, the policy sustains Elitdom by disregarding traditional sources of knowledge from entering into the education system and disabling traditional wisdom and skills from challenging elite messianism. It focuses on fulfilling the material need of the individual as an end, and creating a workforce that is needed for manufacturing which is not the most common means of income or employer for the majority at present. There is no clearly set national ideal to which individuals could subscribe their achievements to, or a center upon which they could anchor their lives and gain a sense of belonging and guidance in their intellectual journey. The immediate visible hope the ETP and GTP portrays is “making Ethiopia a middle-income economy”. But what does it mean to individuals when a country becomes a middle-income economy? During my field study, some expressed hope for a third meal in a day, others a job where they can make use of their studies, others a sight of a train passing across the capital, others a car and a home. But when asked how this could come about, all point to the mighty hands of the state.

Employment within modern institutions is the commonly anticipated end result of schooling. However, the type of work anticipated is not abundantly available and the educational content has little alignment to the reality of the economic life of the country. The problem of gaining relevant knowledge that would result in generating income is compounded by the use of English as a medium of instruction. In this sense, the system provides no basis for cementing the relationship between the

students and their society. Instead, it breeds centerlessness, the loss of cultural roots in one's society, and attempts to reinvent the local as a peripheral extension for the global dominance of the free flowing capital by producing a workforce that cannot be utilized by the economic activities of the majority. The vision to become a middle income economy without a clear meaning of what this vision holds to individuals, and aspiring to become part of the current global economic order is a clear expression of the faith of Elitdom in Eurocentrism. Moving Ethiopia away from its self-contained historical and traditional existence, even when the destination of that move is not clear, invites a vision of disengagement from one's place, from the center that binds society together. The next section elaborates this disengagement by analyzing the effect of the education system on the social life of current Ethiopian students. It considers how the school system allows students to develop identity, social roles and perspectives that alienate them from their place in tradition and society.

The Construction of Student Self-identity and Schooling

All of the university students that I interviewed and had discussions with during my field work considered themselves as important agents of change in the country. This sense of missionarism emanates not from any form of acquired knowledge but from a strong sense of awareness about the "dismal" background from where many students came from. Such a humble background is generally described as poverty, backwardness, rurality and ignorance. Almost all students that I met consider themselves, their community and country poor, and many of them associate poverty primarily with the lack of education. Education is frequently associated with the acquisition of scientific knowledge, something that can be obtained only by going to school. In every conversation, students enacted the role of a civilizer without a clear perception of the correlation or relevance between their careers and the social field to which it would be applied. The most common answer to the question why do you study is "*sayimar ya-sitemaregnin hizb lemerdat*", "to help the people who gave me education without having it for themselves". This response runs like a proverb, and is regarded as common sense. This view is also shared by poor parents who blame their inability to go to school as the cause of their poverty.

Although students express their desire to change their communities, once they start to attend high school, many of them view themselves in isolation from the rest of the community or the family. This process of self-exclusion or isolation starts to manifest itself in the various roles they take at home, in the field, or within the community. In most instances, there is opposite correlation between one's level of study in the western school and social engagement in the community. The more educated a person is, the less involved that person tends to become in local life and traditional institutions. Involvement in manual labor such as farming, clearing weeds, herding cattle and attending traditional festivals declines with increased schooling. Based on my observations and interviews in Lalibela, this opposite correlation in attitude, behavior and perspective is highly tolerated by parents and other community members for numerous reasons.

First, an educated student brings a sense of pride to his/her family members, and the student is deferred from manual labor in the same way that most authorities were traditionally exempted from working in the field. The common Ethiopian proverb "*yetemare yigdelegne*" which is equivalent to saying, "may I die in the good hands of an educated person" expresses this common view. This means that Ethiopian elites obtain not just intellectual privilege from studying in a western school but also cultural capital that can be converted into various forms of privileges in their familial and local community settings (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). In fact, the knowledge that the school confers to the students is advertised as a means to power. This instrumental use of knowledge is especially emphasized in students' textbooks. For example, the Grade 12 Civics and Ethical Education student textbook states that, "Knowledge is the most powerful tool in the hands of man" (MOE, 2009b, p. 137). Similarly, the Grade 11 Civics and Ethical Education provides the significance of knowledge as follows: "With knowledge you are powerful, but with ignorance you are weak. ... Knowledge give you power in any given situation. When you are ignorant you become weak" (MOE, 2009a, p. 130). It further creates canonical links among fact, science, knowledge and truth; and associates tradition and beliefs with myth. The student textbook declares:

Human knowledge is built based on scientific facts. Facts reveal the true nature of reality. Thus knowledge is truth about things in nature. Truth

is the proven facts about something rather than what people generally accept. Beliefs that are not true may be called myths. They are not proven to be true through scientific methods of investigation. The basis of a myth is often tradition. ... Knowledge, wisdom and truth are tools to a good life. Today, governments are making use of knowledge to improve the living conditions of people. Myths are unscientific stories that people would like to tell and believe. Knowledge is truth. Knowledge creates the force that changes society (MOE, 2009a, p. 134).

In clear contrast to the traditional view of knowledge as humility and wisdom, here knowledge is presented as a means to gain strength over weakness, truth over myth, and science over tradition. None of these words are explained independently or defined as theories that explain a particular set of ideas. Instead, these concepts are dimly perceived as spatially located attributes of dissimilar societies, demarcating the boundary between what is traditional and Ethiopian on the one side, and what is modern and western on the other. Poverty is regarded as an internal weakness of those who are ignorant. During my field study and interviews, it was apparent that students considered knowledge as a superior attribute that does not belong to those who do not go to the modern school.

Exposure to modern schooling is the most important yardstick in determining eligibility to public leadership roles that relate the local people to state functions. Even in rural areas, positions offered by the government in local schools, rural health posts, agricultural branches, adjudicative posts and other government services require some level of exposure to modern schooling. Irrespective of skills, character or even experiences, a person with some level of schooling is considered capable of leading those without it. Consequently, young graduates are often assigned to carry out leadership roles in rural areas. Usually, elders or traditional scholars are not regarded fit to carry out formal government responsibilities. This simply violates the tradition of associating age with maturity and experience, as it were elders and traditional scholars who were attributed with greater social responsibilities.

Western education is often called “*yaskola timhirt*” which means the school of scholars while traditional education is referred to as “*yekolo timhirt*” to refer to the practice of learning by begging *kolo* (semi fried cereal food). In the town of Lalibela, which is considered to be one of

the famous centers of traditional knowledge, traditional scholars teach a small number of students, usually in their own backyards or near the churches. Government schools, on the other hand, have a large number of students but do not allow traditional scholars to play any role in the education system. A teacher's response to the possibility of allowing traditional scholars to teach the Amharic language or civics in government schools was this: "We know that there are several church scholars around the town. However, these people do not have the relevant qualification to teach in our classrooms" (Interview, May 6, 2012). What is considered relevant here is not knowledge but its formalization. Irrespective of its importance, knowledge that does not come through the formal channels of the state or state approved institutions is considered irrelevant for public use in the formal systems.

Perceptions of Modernity and Tradition

The education system enhances elite messianism by putting the students in contradiction to their local traditions. On the one hand, it initiates a sense of responsibility whereby students express their commitment to change the lives of their people using their education. On the other hand, by excluding the traditional knowledge of the society it projects the great majority of the people as primitive whose tradition should be eradicated or significantly changed. The perception of primitivism is especially common in viewing the lives of the rural people. The term "*gebere*" or "*balagar*" which means "peasant" or "someone from the countryside" is sometimes applied to insult a person as backward or uncivilized. The peasant is often identified with various marks of backwardness such as style of dressing, accent, and place of residence, unhygienic appearance, and a state of confusion with urban etiquette. A student from the capital city explained how he identifies *balagers* or peasants:

Balagers wear their *kumita* (shorts) without underwear and their *berabasso* (hand-made plastic shoes) without socks. Most of them go without shoes altogether and do not bother about taking shower even once in a year. Their hand-made scarfs, khaki shorts, superstitions and especially their sticks are their lifelong companions. You cannot isolate them from these things. They carry their sticks wherever they go – the market, the

church or the city– and they would not have any hesitation to strike you on the head if they understood that you were deriding them (Interview, May 7, 2012).

The sense of inferiority ascribed to peasant life adversely affects the social life of university students who come from the rural area. As soon as these students join university, they are expected to abandon the traditional clothes that are normally worn by the majority of the rural people. They require urban cloths because the khaki shorts and shirts are typical markers of rurality. The pressure of finding acceptable clothing by modern standards is enormously challenging for many students. This pressure is somehow lifted in schools due to the compulsory requirement of having to wear uniforms, although many parents still find it difficult to afford uniforms to their children.

The perception of contradiction between modernity and tradition leads to the breakdown of communication between persons represented by the two identities. Many students said they feel uneasy to have deeper conversations with their parents and relatives about their knowledge and experience. The situation tends to be common, especially when the parents are rural peasants. Students think their parents would not understand them. Responding to the meaning of being modern, a student reflected as follows:

For me, being modern means '*yegebaw*', [being aware, being up-to-date]. Someone who goes with the time is modern. You will know more about the world, about other people, and you are not left behind time, behind others. The world changes constantly, so must you. People should change with it, otherwise what is the point of learning if you do not change? You will remain backward. Our people cannot change because they did not have a chance to learn new things, and it is too late to tell them to change now. Only their children could become modern if they allow them to go to school (Interview, May 21, 2012).

This response can be contrasted to other responses in a more general description of the role of intellectuals in society. Students usually express their social responsibility as being one of changing the country by teaching the mass population who gave them free education without having

it for themselves. Yet, as presented above, some students find it difficult to communicate their school knowledge to their own significant others. This conflict between the sense of tradition and modernity may be considered in terms of conflict between traditional and modern sources of authority. Traditional authority in the household emanates from age and parental authority. The parent or the elder is entitled to discipline or give advice to or order the young. This seniority based on age extends to relatives and neighbors, and is regarded fair as everyone will get a chance to become a minor then a senior. By contrast, western education suggests a new source of authority and privilege based on schooling. The superior position of modern identities is justified based on the belief in the inferior position of tradition. That means, in order to assume a higher position of significance, modern identities demand separation from tradition.

During various encounters between university students and peasants, it is often the latter's experiences and views that come under scrutiny. The schooled person is believed to be knowledgeable without being questioned about the content of his/her knowledge. Consequently, the estrangement of the student from traditional knowledge and activities is often taken as a sign of freedom from the bondage of tradition. This perspective has repercussions in terms of undermining the sense of accountability tradition afforded to local people over their leaders because traditional leadership required the fulfilment of customary expectations by the leader. State institutions on the other hand do not have such requirements. There is no single code of practice that compels the elites to comply with local customs. Participation in government-initiated community activities such as gatherings, elections, local road construction, tree planting and so on are fraught with frequent defections. One response seems to sum up the common reason: "We do not participate full heartedly because they have neither our wisdom nor persons whom we consider are wise and trustworthy" (Interview, May 18, 2012).

Communication between a rural individual and a state agent galvanizes various signs of power that setup an unbalanced relationship between the two. The modern institution with its bureaucracy and equipment projects not the advancement of the system but the backwardness of the peasant. The peasant is projected as a helpless child who has no idea what to do until told, who has little expectation of what these people will do next, or what all these articles and procedures are all about. By

this very process, the peasant remains as an outsider – sometimes as a curious spectator, other times as a helpless patient who does whatever is prescribed by the “professional” agent. A parent’s response regarding his son’s education was “I know nothing about what he studies ... I send him there hoping he would not end up like me” (Interview, May 19, 2012).

The only rejection to the leadership position of western educated elites came from traditional scholars who attach strong moral character to a person’s claim of being worthy of having a valuable scholarship. Here, dualism is not totally ignored, and the power of the modern school is tacitly recognized. However, what is rejected is the validity of western knowledge that does not pass the belief standards of the society. The life of the intellectual needs a spiritual center, without which his/her knowledge, however useful, is considered vain. A *dabtara* reiterated to me his critique of “modern” intellectuals as follows:

Educated people can fly in the sky; they can rotate on the earth and eat what is pleasing to their eyes. They have clothes to their body, shoes to their feet, glasses to their eyes, watches to their wrist. They do not have to work hard like peasants. Regrettably, most of them do not observe fasting, and they do not come to our church for prayers, or keep their *mateb*² around their neck. What is the use of knowledge if it cannot redeem the soul? What is power if it cannot lift the poor? The wise Solomon said, everything under the sun is in vain, and the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom (Interview, May 27, 2012).

From this perspective, the ethical dimension of knowledge is considered more significant than its intellectual content. I observed that due to the apparent laxity of elites in fulfilling traditional expectations as members of the local community, and also due to their tendency to disregard spiritual beliefs and cultural practices, their ability to influence cultural life is significantly low. A traditional school teacher commented on the issue saying, “Character is louder than speech. Their [the elites’] knowledge is earthly, useful only for the flesh” (Interview, May 27, 2012). This disregard to the epistemic power of the modern

2. *Mateb* is a thin thread tied around the neck of a child upon baptism as a sign of being an Orthodox Christian.

school is sometimes regarded by elites as the result of the bad influence of the teachings of the Ethiopian church. Yet, given the highly theoretical nature of schooling itself and its imperceptible contribution to the improvement of the lives of the people, it is not surprising to encounter some degree of skepticism in the inherent worth of the ideas and values of the school. An elder who was also a *dabtara* argued that, as far as the people are concerned, today's elites are not better than the elites of the imperial period:

My son, let me tell you the difference between the monarchical leaders of the past and the modern leaders of the present. The monarchical leaders of the past treated the common people as their servants because they believed that the latter did not have their royal blood. The modern leaders of the present treat the people as illiterates and ignorant because the people did not go to their schools. The monarchical leaders justified their authority based on the will of God. The modern leaders justified their authority based on the certificate they obtained from the school. In reality, both are different faces of the same coin because both consumed from the people without delivering on their promises (Interview, May 11, 2012)

In summary, this section analyzed student self-identity, perception of social roles, and perspectives on modernity and tradition. The identity and role of students constructed through the school system could be considered as a contemporary version of missionaryism that was explained in Chapter Five. One of the most important points in this section is the sense of detachment from tradition that the students manifest in their social lives. Students express identities that show little attachment to tradition. Rural life and traditional experiences are regarded as expressions of backwardness. Education is perceived not only as a process of mental transition but also a spatial one, a journey from the rural to the city, from the local to the global, and from Ethiopia to the West. Students abandon tradition and struggle to embrace the deceptive promises of knowledge, which is power, as provided in their textbook. What's more, this dislocation between the student and their own traditions and people means that they do not contribute to the betterment of their society, as if often assumed of the modern school system. This highlights the importance of

relevance, whereby education must relate back to the cultural and historical context of its students

It is important to use the notion of place to better understand the sense of detachment effected by western education. Place could be understood as an embodiment of tradition, a source of knowledge, identity and experience. Both the Ethiopian traditional system and the western education system emanate from places, the former from Ethiopia and the latter from other places in the West. Detachment from tradition, as explained above, could be regarded as alienation from Ethiopia as place. However, it also entails an attempt to find or create a “western place” within Ethiopia. The education system appears as a means to realize this illusory endeavor by promising opportunities within the systems and structures run by the ruling elite. Students develop new values, interests, styles and aspirations that increase their detachment from tradition, and attempt to find a place within Elitdom.

Alienation from Elitdom

As explored in the previous section, since the western education system projects the Ethiopian tradition as primitive, it initiates a sense of messianism among students to change it. Consequently, students develop identities, social roles and perspectives that detach them from tradition. This is the first stage of alienation. The second stage of alienation develops as students start to experience powerlessness and meaninglessness due to failure to achieve a secured place within Elitdom. Failure to join university or graduate from it and failure to gain employment are examples that show alienation from Elitdom. This section analyses the experience of powerlessness and meaninglessness among high school and university students, and theorizes the combined effect of the two stages of alienation as centerlessness.

Sources of Powerlessness

Powerlessness emerges due to the subjugation of the academic life of students to the whims and caprices of individuals or groups who run the system. It can also arise due to lack of capacity or efficiency of the education system. Students who are already alienated from their tradition

become powerless when they realize that the “modern” system has no place for them. Failure to influence decisions that affect them; the inability to challenge arbitrary rules, procedures and outcomes; and the reality of having to study through institutions whose rules and procedures could be subverted by dubious means could create the condition of powerlessness. To some extent, the use of this word coincides with Seeman’s idea of powerlessness as the inability of the individual to have “influence over socio-political events” (1959, p. 785). In the Ethiopian condition, powerlessness involves the existence of a formal system of power that operates based on informal associations and influences. By presenting limited places for study and then employment, the system inevitably creates powerlessness to many.

The condition of powerlessness is not evenly distributed among all students. Generally, high school students seem to experience it less frequently than those in universities. The promises of education are not seriously doubted at the lower level of the school system. Besides, the opening of several new universities and vocational training colleges gives a sense of relief and hope for many students. The common source of powerlessness among high school students arises from concern with passing the national exam to join university. A grade 12 student expressed this concern as follows:

My only worry is how to pass the exam and join university. I am worried because I am competing against [grade 12] students all over the country [to pass the national examination]. I must work hard, day and night, and once I get into university, I do not have to worry about anything. I will get my degree and make my family proud and happy (Interview, April 25, 2012).

At university level, powerlessness occurs with the realization that students cannot change the circumstances that are unfolding before their lives because decisions that influence their future are made by others. But the intensity of powerlessness varies from time to time. It becomes serious during and immediately after exams among students, and may considerably affect their lives at that time. As the assignment of students to particular fields of study is centrally decided by the Ministry of Education, students who are allocated to unfavorable fields may experience

powerlessness for a long period of time. While students are allowed to “choose” their fields of studies, the decision to get their first choice depends on their achievement at the national examination. Those who scored the highest grades get a chance to go to their first choice and those who scored lower grades are simply assigned to any available social or natural science departments. Once assigned to a particular field of study, students will have no option to change their field of study. The decision could impact their lives as they are likely to be assigned to economically less valued fields of studies. The anxiety of a third year university student over the possibility of gaining employment illustrates this point:

What is the point of studying hard if I am not going to find employment after graduation? I grew up dreaming to change my life and the life of my parents using education. But I did not exactly know which field of study was the best for me. The government chose for me to study Anthropology and I do not clearly know what to do with it later. But, I am making efforts to pass and graduate. I believe it is better than staying home and doing nothing (Interview, May 27, 2012)

The origin of these two senses of alienation emanate from the nature of the education system itself. Education does not enable students to develop social roots throughout their school life. As argued in previous chapters, the content of education has little Ethiopian content especially in high school. Consequently, students grow up overemphasizing individual economic goals as an end for education. They develop views and values that attach them with Elitdom more than with their community or society. As Elitdom operates by subverting and subjecting tradition to its own power interests, students become bodies who submit themselves to its disciplining and productive power rather than becoming agents for the fulfilment of the aspirations and interests of their communities.

Concern over Academic Results

Concern over academic results is probably the strongest of all the other concerns that university students have to face throughout their university lives. Almost every student I talked to expressed deep dissatisfaction about grades. A student noted, “you are not judged by your understanding but

by your grade only. Your exam result is the only factor which determines who you are because without it your academic life is dead” (Interview, June 2, 2012). For many of the students, the concern over exam results has little to do with the knowledge of the subject matter although they acknowledge that this too is important. Instead, it has more to do with concern over the person who decides who gets what grade as marking is the prerogative of the lecturer. Many students have details of their lecturers’ behavior, what type of questions the lecturer is likely to ask, whether he/she cares about class attendance or not, and what he/she appreciates or dislikes. This information passes from students in previous groups to the next. In this process, students work towards meeting the imagined expectations of their lecturers. Grades, as a means of achieving this outcome, require a torturous journey towards the mind of the lecturer, and taking detailed lecture notes is one of the ways through which this journey is accomplished.

I have met students who consider lecture notes as the principal source of their study for exams. They copy almost everything the teacher says in class. Those who are unable to take good notes often due to lack of English language skill, or missed classes, borrow and photocopy notes from other students. Lecture notes are not supplementary resources. I have observed several students’ notes—highlighted, underlined and some even fading and torn apart from over use. There are numerous small shops outside Addis Ababa University where students can pay to copy and share good lecture notes and other reading materials among friends. Commenting on a fading lecture note he was holding, a university student remarked the following:

Some teachers are not bothered to change the content of their notes. ... They simply repeat and repeat and repeat their notes year after year and year. Sometimes, they boycott classes without even notifying us. We simply wait and wait for about 15 to 30 minutes and go to the cafeteria or the library (Interview, June 2, 2012)

The concern over grades emanates from the knowledge that the formal system is inefficient and untrustworthy. Students who believed that their mark was not fair, or who thought they were victimized by a lecturer for some reason, do not have a trustworthy body to appeal to. Although there

is a process whereby the student could fill out a form and apply to the teacher to reconsider the grade, the common outcome is, “No change” (Interview, June 2, 2012). Many lecturers do not return examination papers to their students. They simply post the grade without providing feedback. A lecturer suggested that he would consider any intervention by any superior authority on marking as a violation of academic freedom. The only viable option students have in this context is informal and personal negotiation. The situation makes female students in particular vulnerable to harassment and sexual exploitation. Here, most lecturers are generally considered disciplined or conservative as they generally avoid personal intimacy with their students. However, the system has no effective means of preventing those who might abuse their position, and there are several disturbing rumors involving the favoritism and indecency of some of the teachers. A female student remembered her circumstances as:

I knew he did not like me from the start. I have been scared of him all the time, and finally he gave me an “F” in his subject. I cannot get an “F”, no way! I know I have answered many questions to earn me a “B” or a “C”. “But marking is subjective”, said everybody. I first thought I should go and talk to him. But what is the point? No teacher changes his mind based on the students’ idea (Interview, June 3, 2012)

The concern over exam results is compounded by a lack of genuine communication between lecturers and students. Students appear fearful of their lecturers, and their communication is conducted with acute awareness of each other’s statuses. There are signs that strengthen the divide between lecturers and students. For example, there are staff cafeterias where students are not normally expected to enter and get served even if they pay. Students are expected to regard their teachers with respect and avoid challenging their authority inside or outside of the classroom. Although the practice of respecting a learned person is part of Ethiopia’s tradition, in this case respect is not motivated by admiration but by fear. Examination result is the major factor that makes such a fear a possible reality. Students who fail in their exams could be dismissed from the university and this would have serious social and economic costs. Socially the dismissed student would feel dishonored and humiliated for being a failure in the eyes of his friends and community. Economically, dismissal results

in the loss of government sponsored meals, accommodation and education. That means, the decision of the teachers could alter the entire life of the student. An engineering student expressed his frustration about lecturers in an interview:

They are cruel; they always try to prove themselves right; they always enjoy when you are suffering! In our department it is difficult to get an A in any subject. On one occasion, many students got an A, and the unit coordinator forced the instructor to reduce the grade. For them, grade is like a precious gold. They try to teach us that what they give us is gold, or money, not our own result (Interview, 27 April, 2012).

Lecturers, on the other hand, appear to choose to avoid students for various reasons. There is a general dissatisfaction with the teaching profession in general due to the low salary (by African standard), lack of transparency in promotion and other administrative issues (Tekleselassie, 2005). Studies indicate that absence of academic freedom and heavy political interference from the government takes the largest blame for academic dissatisfaction and powerlessness (Yimam, 2008). This was especially clear when 41 professors, including the President and the two vice-presidents of the university were summarily dismissed from Addis Ababa University for being critical of the government in April 1993 (Vestal, 1999, p. 56) and about 40 students and other civilians were shot dead when taking part in a demonstration initiated by Addis Ababa University students in April 2001 (Human Rights Watch, 24 January 2003). Moreover, university lecturers feel that they are overburdened by too many overcrowded classes.

Here, it is difficult to imagine how students could identify a stable social center in this destabilized social setting. In this context, the issue of centeredness arises with the difficulty to uphold social values and relationships above the preoccupation with survival and personal safety. As students try to get the best results from their lecturers and the lecturers from the university administration, each in their own way expresses unresolved grievances that promote powerlessness. The concern over grades overshadows the pursuit of knowledge to serve the common good or to achieve higher goals. Grades become one of the determinant factors for a student's worth to society. This has made learning a painful process for many students. A university student noted:

As to me, this is not a university of learning; this is a university of suffering. You have so many worries that your lecturer does not even consider as a problem. Your tension could kill you; in fact, there are students who killed themselves: one threw himself from the fifth floor of the Engineering building, another hanged himself. There are many who went crazy and wander along the streets (Interview, June 1, 2013).

Another student also commented:

Usually, you cannot question the teachers' decision. You cannot even try to show that you have a better point than the lecturer. If you complain, you know, lecturers support each other; the administrator you complain to is more likely to side with his colleague than with you. Besides, there is a general belief that students are less trustworthy than their teachers are, and teachers are unlikely to harm their students without good cause. You just have to leave everything to fate and to their discretion (Interview, June 1, 2013).

It should be noted that there are formal processes of appeal for grievances within department or university administration offices. However, these options are hardly exercised. Students believe that all formal systems within the university operate with powerful informal drives within them, drives that are invisible and impermeable to reason or merit. Such drives include among others, personal relationships, ethnic belonging, and political affiliation. These informal drives are often mistaken as having their sources in tradition. For example, the problem of ethnicism is sometimes portrayed as having its roots in tradition although it has been a politically invented phenomenon to classify, disintegrate, and manage persons based on their social identities (Zahorik, 2011). In Ethiopia, ethnic belonging as a political identity emerged within the Ethiopian Student Movement in 1969 (Zewde, 2010). Many students either embrace this politicized version of reinvented tradition or become estranged from tradition altogether. Either way, the practice leads to alienation and the difficulty to uphold and adhere to either social values or institutional ideals.

The process affects not just individuals but also the society at large. It contributes to the inability to connect with public or cultural institutions based on the living values and interests of the society, and the

inability to find a credible center that anchors the academic efforts of the student. Sacrificed to the satisfaction of the expectation of the system and devoted to the attainment of grades, the academic effort of the students fails short of becoming a search for independent meaning. It leads to centeredness, the inability to become intellectually grounded in one's own society, or in a socio-cultural context.

Concern over Job Prospects

Another influential aspect of the alienating effect of Ethiopia's education system is the stress and anxiety it creates on the prospect of finding a job after graduation. This anxiety is exasperated due to the contradiction between the promise and the reality of education. As presented above, education is preached as a promise to power. However, for many students, the chilling reality of being unemployed and dependent on their parents is frustrating. Some students try to avoid this experience by creating attachment with individuals or organizations that have the power to provide employment. The most common way of doing this is by becoming a member of the ruling political party while studying at university. Students mentioned that this phenomenon has become common after the May 2005 national election in the country (Interview, June 5, 2012).

In this study, I have used various historical events to illustrate the occurrence of interrelated changes in the Ethiopian society. May 2005 could be considered as a historical event in terms of triggering various changes in the country. The national election resulted in the gaining of unexpectedly many seats for a newly formed coalition of opposition political parties, which was mired with controversy over rigged votes. This led to a government crackdown against demonstrators, killing dozens of people. Most opposition political party leaders were detained and charged with serious crimes including genocide until they were freed by the reconciliatory effort of a few Ethiopian elders. Then, the EPRDF reclaimed most of the seats that were lost to the opposition. As shown in the Amnesty International Report, laws that diminished the activities of opposition political groups, human rights organizations, and independent press were introduced (2012). Universities and high schools became targets of political mobilization, and a large number of students started to seek membership in the ruling party. At the next election, in 2010, EPRDF

claimed to have won a staggering 99.6% of the national parliamentary seats in the country. Currently, there is hardly any meaningful opposition or student political activism against the government, and a culture of fear has reigned throughout the post-2005 election period (Tronvoll, 2012, p. 282). The search for jobs after graduation takes place under this political environment.

The sense of powerlessness over job prospects after graduation is exasperated by the availability of little relevant information about the job market and the reality of work outside the university. Students gain little information about the exact purpose, activity, and location of industries that might utilize their expertise. Due to a lack of transparency and opportunities through the formal system, students try to devise informal ways to influence the system in their favor. The common practice of becoming a party member requires the acceptance of the ideology of the party as a messianic truth and a practical demonstration of loyalty and obedience to its ranks and files. This is achieved through performing various political assignments that are not related to their study. Although students call themselves members of EPRDF, technically individuals cannot become members as EPRDF is a coalition of ethnic based regional parties. Instead, students become members of the EPRDF-affiliate political party of their respective ethnic origin which may have a Principal Organizations in the campus that run numerous study cells of more than 25 individuals each. As a consequence of joining ethnic based parties, the student's approach to politics is oriented toward ethnic nationalism. This creates a contradiction with the education system that advocates universal globalism and "international standard".

Students who become party members refrain from criticizing the party or the government. The process of looking for a job by becoming a political party member indicates the level of powerlessness students feel to change their own lives using their professional training. The students that I interviewed were reluctant to discuss political issues in detail. The government, being the major employer of graduates, influences the extent to which the promise of education could be translated into individual gains through employment. The students' sense of fear and uncertainty to talk about political issues is a clear indication of more than a lack of confidence in the system of Elitdom. The system through which the students spent years of study, starting from elementary school to university level,

operates based on rules that are not written in their study books. The formal and informal ways through which the students attach themselves with the system falls short of providing them with a sense of security, certainty, or centeredness. This state of powerlessness makes academic life a form of precarious existence.

The Use of Violence Against Dissent

Despite the circumstances that compel students to submit to the elite demands of the system, Ethiopian students are not passive objects of repression. The history of struggle for academic and other freedoms in Ethiopia shows the ultimate sacrifices students paid to change the unjust conditions that they and their country faced. However, almost all of the demands proposed by the students have been met with violence. Inside the university, lack of free and independent student body, absence of independent student press, lack of transparency and inefficiency in student services and the presence of police force inside the campus are some of the major issues that contribute to powerlessness. Several students complain that they have no place to go for independent, impartial and effective resolution of their grievances.

The common practice of student protest which often involves boycotting classes and chanting slogans always end up with academic suspension, dismissal or arrest of active participants. The government's police force is often called upon to break student protest by force. In April 2001, students protested to have an independent union, newspaper and removal of the police force from the campus. The use of police violence to break the protest ignited further protest by high school students and members of the public outside the campus which led to the killing of about forty students and other civilians, the wounding of hundreds and the arrest of thousands of students (Human Rights Watch, 24 January 2003). The majority of the students boycotted classes for one year but returned to class in April 2002 by submitting to the demands of the government. A similar protest took place following the 2005 election and violence was used to submit the students to the demand of the state. Along with the use of violence, the state uses mandatory capacity building meetings where by students are proselytized with the ideology of the government and encouraged to join pro-government political parties.

Several students participate in apolitical activities such as watching European premier league football, western movies and music, becoming active consumers of the cultural imperialism that is engulfing the youth of many poor countries. Most of the recent years' protests take an ethnic character, involving especially students from Oromia, and are violently suppressed through intimidation, suspension or arrest by the government forces. A similar sense of powerlessness permeates teachers whose association (ETA) has been crippled since 1992, and whose grievances over low payment and exclusion from decision making is unanswered, making them one of the most unorganized and dissatisfied elite groups in the country. The denial of academic freedom since the end of Haile Selassie to the present day reveals the gulf between the slogan and practice of elite messianism in the country. When Addis Ababa University was first established in 1950, it was granted autonomy under the Imperial Charter, although many critics argue that the autonomy was superficial. Yet, the Ethiopian elites who took power since Haile Selassie denied the University of any autonomous status, or a Charter that ensures, among other things, academic freedom. Both the Derg and EPRDF controlled the university under the exclusive power of the Ministry of Education. The real possibility of violence against dissent creates a sense of powerlessness and also contributes to a sense of meaninglessness towards the messianic dream of changing society using western knowledge.

Sources of Meaninglessness

Alienation as meaninglessness takes into account the quantity and quality of information or knowledge that students obtain through their education. Meaninglessness occurs when such knowledge prevents a clear and predictable understanding of the social and political world resulting in the inability of the individual to identify a clear choice or make informed decisions (Finifter, 1970, p. 64). The content and method of western education in Ethiopia does not provide students with the clear knowledge that helps them make informed choices about their future. Consequently, the information students obtain through their studies become meaningless as they are unable to use it to change their circumstances.

The education system contributes to meaninglessness in various ways. First, students who are separated from their tradition expect to find new

information to define themselves and the world around them. However, the information they obtain through the education system is irrelevant and insufficient to clearly understand the social and economic world, and predict their academic and career futures. Due to the cult of “international standard”, knowledge production on Ethiopian realities is very scarce. Undergraduate, postgraduate and other research papers that focus on domestic issues are analyzed with strict application of western theories and concepts. Insufficient information occurs due to a lack of reasonably up-to-date learning materials such as books, internet, and other equipment. In Addis Ababa University, there is a general lack of academic books, journals and other publications. At the time of this study, the big libraries such as John F. Kennedy Library and Law School Library have a collection of very old books and periodicals. Students complain that most of these materials are outdated. Internet access is often limited to only one hour per student, and during exams important books are borrowed to students only for few hours due to scarcity. The content of the information provided in the student textbooks and lectures focuses on abstract theories. Due to the lack of correlation between the world of study and work, students gain very little opportunity to test the practical significance of their knowledge in real life settings. They manifest a general sense of uncertainty and insecurity when they try to interpret social realities or address practical issues using the theories and skills they acquired through their training. This is exacerbated by the use of English as a medium of instruction from high school to university and its non-use as a medium of communication in the society.

Students gain firsthand information from their tradition about the social world around them and they feel that the English words and concepts they acquired through their studies do not enable them to fully describe their traditional and cultural experiences. The process of translating concepts, ideas, and theories from English to Amharic and vice versa makes it difficult to fully understand and develop a critical approach to social and political reality. In high schools, the use of television broadcasts can be considered as another factor that contributes to meaninglessness as students find it difficult to comprehend the content of the lesson being transmitted to them. Several students blame themselves for failing to understand their teachers and books. The above and many related factors prevent students from fully and clearly understanding the social

and political system to which they aspire to belong. Meaninglessness, the lack of relevant knowledge and effective information to develop well-informed views, subjects students to a precarious and dependent position in relation to Elitdom.

Another important source of meaninglessness arises due to the process of misinformation about tradition and history. The Ethiopian tradition can be regarded as the students' immediate source of self-definition. As analyzed in Chapter Two, the Ethiopian tradition provides a sense of covenant nation. Stories, songs, proverbs, and fables that glorify a sense of heroic nationalism are abundant in the culture. The Ethiopian tradition upholds a national history of more than 3000 years, a spirit of freedom and independence from colonial domination, a welcoming spirit to strangers and a notion of ancient civilization and literature. The country has a rich legacy of intellectual tradition and the traditional education system offered studies in history and philosophy. However, the existing Ethiopian education system follows a Eurocentric interpretation of history that contradicts the traditional knowledge of the students. The ETP portrays Ethiopia's past as a legacy of complex problems caused by selfish regimes. It mentions no positive contribution from tradition. The same approach is followed in the way that the study of Ethiopian history is organized and presented in Grade 11 and Grade 12 textbooks. For example, the Grade 11 history textbook credits Europeans for pioneering the writing of Ethiopian history. Although there were local historians long before the Europeans, the textbook states that Ethiopian sources of history lack objectivity (MOE, 2006, p. 4). According to the textbook, to be objective is "to present the reality as they really were and in the way they really occurred" (MOE, 2006, p. 3). The textbook argues that since the traditional manuscripts such as chronicles of Ethiopian Christian kings were biased, the objective study of Ethiopian history did not began until Job Ludolf (1624-1704) founded Ethiopian studies in Europe in the 17th century (MOE, 2006, pp. 3-4). Ludolf wrote the first Ethiopian history in 1684, followed by other European writers. Ethiopians began to write their country's history only towards the end of the 19th Century. Here, the question why European travelers and missionaries are regarded more objective than Ethiopian writers could only be explained by the Eurocentric view that history becomes objective and real only when it

is written by Europeans or from the perspective of Europe (Wallerstein, 1997).

In the student textbooks, the organization of Ethiopian history is prefaced by European and other countries' history. A student in Grade 11 learns about ancient Egypt, China, Japan, Greece, Rome, Medieval Europe, the Age of Feudalism, the Roman Catholic Church, Byzantine Empire, Islam, Ottoman Turkish Empire, Manorialism, Crusades, and India before studying anything about "the different peoples and languages of Ethiopia" and the Axum and Zagwe dynasties. A teacher commented that the breakdown of Ethiopian history into pieces of historical narrations that are spread out into a sea of information about other countries' histories dilutes the sense of comprehensiveness and richness the subject needs. Moreover, the emphasis on ethnic history creates further issues of politicization as it has ignited more dissatisfaction by teachers and students. A teacher commented on this as follows:

I am not against teaching the history of dozens of tribes in the country. But I am unhappy to see that the emphasis on ethnic history eclipsed the great history of Ethiopia as a nation that was hailed by historians throughout the world. Students need to know the great things that we had in the past. However, the current Ethiopian political system has emphasized a history of ethnic domination in the past, and students cannot understand ethnic history in isolation from the political meaning and significance assigned to it at the present. They are made to judge the events of the past by the grievances of the present. ... I can tell you that teaching Ethiopian history is the most difficult topic at the present (Interview, 12 May, 2012).

Some students manifest uncertainty about relying on the official information provided in their textbooks. For example, civics textbooks provide rich information about the ideal constitutional and democratic rules, values and processes the country is considered to be following at the present. However, students joke on the content of their civics textbooks by comparing it with the practice of various forms of injustices that they experience, such as lack of academic freedom and expression. Distrust about the content of their studies encouraged the proliferation of new and hitherto unheard stories to surface among the appearance of

truth. For example, a student expressed resentment towards the content of history textbooks for failing to divulge the suffering of the Oromo people under the rule of Menelik:

Menelik said, 'let religion, language, and history be one'. He also said, 'a child who has no Amharic name shall not attend school'. Menelik said this because he was afraid of the rise of the numerous and brave Oromo people in his empire. He also destroyed the religion of the Oromo which was *waqe fatta*, the worship of the one creator under a naturally grown tree or near a river. Menelik said, 'whoever believed in *waqe fetta* shall have his penis cut off if he is a man, or her breast cut off if she is a woman'. This history is not written in our books; it is hidden out of denigration to the people of Oromo (Interview, May 10, 2012).

As described above, the insufficiency, irrelevancy and lack of credibility of information imparted through the education system fails to provide students with sufficient understanding about the social and political world around them. The emphasis on ethnic history and its politicization through the political process creates a sense of distrust and division among students. This condition produces meaninglessness as students are unable to determine the likely outcome of social and political processes and fail to distinguish the relevant information that could help them to achieve their aspirations.

Centerlessness as the Effect of Western Education in Ethiopia

In summary, the combined effect of the two senses of alienation creates centerlessness. First, the education system isolates students from their traditional roots. It declares tradition backward and barbaric; it initiates a sense of mission and a promise of power to students. Alienated from their place in tradition, students make efforts to seize the promises of western knowledge through the formal channels of the state. Although knowledge is presented as a stepping stone or a promise to power, Elitism has strong barriers that make it difficult for many students to succeed. Consequently, students fall into the condition of powerlessness and meaninglessness. Powerlessness and meaninglessness occurs with

the realization that the formal system is unreliable as it is subverted by the informal motives of those in charge of making decisions, and when students are convinced that they cannot do anything to influence the way decisions are made regarding them. Concerns over being accepted to university study, receiving fair grades and gaining employment after graduation are examples associated with powerlessness. Instead of social goals that are constituted formally, the effort of the students is directed towards fulfilling informal procedures and unwritten rules. Moreover, insufficient, irrelevant and contradictory information supplied through the education system creates a sense of meaninglessness among students. Students fail to clearly understand and critically evaluate their situation to make needed adjustments against the system. While powerlessness promotes dependency on the elite system, meaninglessness promotes despair and distrust towards it.

These two conditions create centerdlessness, which is the opposite of being centered in traditional and social life. It is the condition of being left asunder from place and from its substitutions, from tradition and modernization. It involves the subjection of one's effort, identity, vision and dignity to a system that is not regarded as dependable and becoming an instrument of alien values and beliefs without having the means to realize them. This condition of centerdlessness duplicates itself to sustain Elitdom. Alienated from tradition, students remain dependent on the system as they cannot fall back to regain support from it. The elite system that facilitates the above processes produces docile individuals that are effectively demobilized, demoralized, individualized and confused. It achieves this by attacking the sources of their traditional identities as primitive, and furnishing a new sense of identity with a promise to power without actually providing the needed knowledge and process to realize it.

The education system promotes centerdlessness through the promotion of contradictory worldviews using Eurocentric universalism and ethnicism. At the lower level, it promotes ethnic nationalism, ethnic consciousness, ethnic history and languages. But at the higher level, the system promotes Eurocentrism in the name of achieving "international standard". It indoctrinates students with western theories and models using English as a medium of instruction. At the same time, during and after graduation, it exposes students to the ethnocentric political structures

and systems of the state. The combined work of Eurocentrism and ethnocentrism, which may be regarded as Eurocentric ethnicism, produces two consequences. First, at the individual level it produces meaninglessness and powerlessness in the lives of many students, as described above. Second, it reduces the ability of the students and graduates to clearly understand and defend the interest of the majority who live according to their traditions.

Centerlessness should be understood in terms of alienation from place in its geographic and theoretical sense. Rural place and rural life are regarded as backward; and modernity is seen as a movement from the rural to the urban, from the local to the global. Theoretically, place as the habitation of the cultural tradition, history, relationships and knowledge of the people in the country is disregarded and replaced by western knowledge that has the appearance of universality. However, in reality, western knowledge itself is rooted in western places. It spreads the cultures, stories, languages and experiences of particular western places and helps to maintain the dominant position of the West. Brain drain, commercialization of agriculture, market for western goods, support for foreign investment, debt, technical cooperation, development projects and so on all facilitate this flight of benefits towards the West. Eurocentric ethnicism disables students' ability to stand against these processes. Furthermore, the alienation of elites from their own society's tradition and from place presents these activities as purely benevolent and progressive.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown the consequences of the establishment of the imitative model of education under the current government in Ethiopia. Imitative education is driven by internal chaos and external pressure. The ETP came into effect in the aftermath of the country's painful transition from kingdom to Elitdom. After the unprecedented terror and massacre of unarmed civilians during the Derg, and the seventeen years of civil war to remove it from power, EPRDF sized power in 1993 and redefined the country as a federation of nations and nationalities with essential ethnic identities. The constitutional recognition for ethnicity as a means of political organization, the right to self-determination up to secession, and the attention given to the development of the rural people through the

agricultural-led development program, seem to portray the recognition of tradition as the engine of progress. However, ethnic groups are administered by western educated political elites who hardly manifest the traditional values and cultural lives of their constituents except for political reasons.

It can be concluded that Elitdom operates based on its attachment with global actors such as the World Bank in the name of achieving “international standard”. It has a clearly stated diffusionist model of education as it aims at spreading science to the society. Knowledge is presented as a means by which the individual acquires power in society. Education is designed as a system through which the individual achieves excellence through competition against other individuals. This approach is contrary to the Ethiopian tradition as a possible source of knowledge for education. As presented in Chapters Two and Three, the traditional view of knowledge as a gift from God that humbles the student to the service of a sacred nation, and the process of education as a search for wisdom to train the senses with humility, promoted the ability of the student to be related to society rather than to be isolated from it.

The expansion of the school to rural areas and the opening of a dozen universities during the last twenty years is a commendable effort. However, due to the ideology with which this effort is conducted, students struggle to cope with the minimum requirements of the system. One of these requirements is the use of the English language as the medium of learning in high schools and universities. Being unable to use the language of their society, and being convinced that their tradition is backward, students become alienated from the tradition that supports life in the Ethiopian context. Many of them are also excluded from the opportunities that may be provided by Elitdom. Centerdlessness is the condition of being alienated from both tradition and Elitdom.

The process of alienation from tradition further develops with imitation of modernist styles and the cultivation of student messianism. Students envision changing their society using their education. However, lack of academic freedom, irrelevant academic content, the use of physical violence to suppress student resistance and lack of transparent and accountable administration creates a condition of powerlessness and meaninglessness. The students’ inability to find a place to which their efforts are geared and from which they derive guidance creates the condition

of centerdlessness which is a further recipe for radicalism. The collapse of independent academic activities shows the inability to find a common national center or an overriding principle that commands the common vision of all. If a country is to stay as a secured and united unit, it needs to have a center, a place that anchors the vision of its masses. Be it a federal or unitary arrangement, the existence of a common ideal that can override selfish individual and group interests is paramount.

CONCLUSION

Theoretical Lessons and Methodological Insights

The link between African states and western education was established through colonialism. At first, education was introduced to train Africans who would assist the colonial administration. The education system cultivated knowledge and identity linked with the colonial system. Through education, it became possible for Africans to believe that the knowledge of the colonizer was a hope for the liberation of the colonized. Initially, by the initiatives of the missionaries and later by the policy of the colonial administrators, the colonial school expanded, and became a significantly important institutional foundation for the postcolonial state. African parents demanded colonial education for their children (Ranger, 1965). Studying about the West, reflecting on its traditions, identifying what is relevant for Africa and what is not, education is seen as a crucial means to achieve power. This process undermined African traditional institutions and created a myth of primitivism that subjected the logic of local traditions to the power of the colonial system.

The end of colonialism brought about a discourse of development, one that redefined the colonizer vs colonized relationship into a developed vs underdeveloped one. As expressed in US President Harry Truman's speech, the exploited and impoverished lands of Africa and other non-western places were labelled "underdeveloped areas". The sharing of the "technological advances" of the West through education became the new civilizing mission (Esteve, 1992, p. 6). As witnessed during the Addis Ababa Conferences of 1961 and 1962, the effort of African countries to determine the content and method of education and utilize African

knowledges and traditions failed due to a lack of support from metropolitan powers (UNESCO, 1961, 1962). Instead, the Jometine consensus, initiated by the World Bank, created the slogan “Education for All”. Today, universal education is accepted as a fundamental human right and the “internationalisation” of higher education is a widely accepted norm, despite criticism that it constitutes the “recolonization of the African mind” by western knowledge (Assie-Lumumba, 2006; Brock-Utne, 2000). Like colonialism, education during the post-colonial period focuses on the study and application of the ideas and experiences of the powerful in the hope of transferring power to the powerless. Once again, the idealism behind universal education masks the epistemic violence that degrades and excludes African traditional and indigenous knowledges from local education.

Ethiopia joined African nations in their quest for western education after World War II. This is a country composed of numerous tribes, customs, languages, and religions that live across scattered villages in a large and varied geographical area. It is also a country that was able to unite the power of these diverse identities by traditional means and score a decisive victory against the Italian army at Adwa in 1896. Perhaps, more significant than the victory of Adwa is the ability of the country to withstand centuries of isolation from the rest of the world due to the occupation of its seacoasts by Islamic forces and the colonization of the rest of Africa and much of Asia by Europe. This book examined the development of *consciousness of power* towards the West, as Ethiopian rulers started to take into account the existence of a powerful enemy that sought to impose its will upon their nation. This reaction to the European gaze created the desire to acquire European weapons in order to defend the country from Europe. The contradiction between enmity and friendship with Europe generated various internal responses, especially when Haile Selassie initiated a radical westernization process.

This consciousness of power further developed among Ethiopian leaders, culminating in the wholesale imitation of western institutions in order to modernize the state. The effect of this process is epistemic violence – the continuing suppression of traditional institutions, customs, worldviews and practices by a new system of knowledge that is imitated from foreign sources. Western knowledge was used to centralize regional power, to homogenize the diverse experiences and identities

within tradition as primitive, and to create what Donald called “vernacular modernism— attempts to reorder local society by the application of strategies that have produced wealth, power, or knowledge elsewhere in the world” (1999, p. xvii). One of the most important outcomes of this process is the emergence of western educated individuals with a new cultural capital. The new elites became missionaries of change for the birth of a new Ethiopia. Western knowledge, with its tendency to objectify and bifurcate reality into antagonistic opposites, initiated new normative divisions, such as modern vs traditional, urban vs rural, manufacturing vs. agrarian and so on. The former identities are believed to be superior to the latter, and the educated are regarded as missionaries of change who would transit the people from the second to the first set of categories. This view of modernization sometimes involves the reformation, incorporation or modification of traditions. The belief that western educated intellectuals have the ability to modernize their people using western knowledge is what I define as elite missionarism.

Elite missionarism created significant discontent in the 1960s and 1970s, as several graduates were unable to achieve their vision through the monarchical system. As both Zewde (2010) and Kebede (2008b) argue (despite differences on emphasizing structural vs. ideological factors), the educated started to blame the imperial system for denying them the opportunity to modernize their people. In the 1960s, a radicalized version of missionarism emerged among university students based on Marxism-Leninism. They adopted new languages from radical Marxist-Leninist sources, reinvented Ethiopian kings in the image of medieval European feudals and foresaw violence as the only way of curing the ailment of the nation. I regard this radical approach as elite messianism. Elite messianism is belief in the role of intellectuals to radically change the society through revolutionary, often violent, means. By large, student messianism is a genuine and passionate commitment to one’s cause, and its problem emanates precisely from this strict demand for ideological conformity. It is a self-appointed initiative that regards its own interpretation as the true expression of the interest of the people. Consequently, messianism has little room for compromise and dialogue, even with groups that follow similar ideologies, making physical violence the most likely method for resolving conflicts. While elite missionarism regarded Ethiopian tradition as backward and subject to change, elite messianism

regarded it reactionary and antithetical to progress, hence subject to eradication. In the 1960s, Ethiopian students followed the messianic initiative of radicalized students who adopted a cult of Fanonian violence as a necessary force that could cleanse the country from feudalism.

The ability of the government to effectively use physical violence replaced student messianism with state messianism. The state took first the slogan, then the ideology of the students. It murdered, expropriated and humiliated what it called feudal leaders and reactionary elements, distributed land to peasants, and organized the rural and urban dwellers under various associations. While the messianic movement of the nationalist students of the 60s and 70s was largely crushed by the Derg, Ethno-nationalist students started one of the longest civil wars in East Africa. After 17 years of armed struggle, they took power from the military in 1991 and have continued to implement their political programs since then. Although several political parties came to the scene during this time, most of them disappeared or fled the country, complaining of various forms of state violence. The above brief summary shows that the Ethiopian political system since 1960s has been dominated by elite messianism. The Derg, EPRDF or other opposition political parties, however bitterly antagonistic to one another, share the ideology of messianism. Their claim for power is not just to save the people from poverty and backwardness but also from the political success of their opponents. Elitism is the new political era whose political, economic, social and other systems resemble that of the colonial system in the rest of Africa. The direction of the country and its inhabitants are centrally determined by the political elite who live in the palace of Haile Selassie, whose values can be shared and communicated only to its clientele, the majority of which are among the urbanized minority group in the country.

The history of western education in Ethiopia is built on the ideology and actions of elite messianism, which invented a local orient and the passion to free him from the bondage of tradition. In Chapter Six, I have shown that the current education system reflects a Eurocentric view of modernism, which includes a "dualistic consciousness, a hierarchical vision of society, and a metaphysical idea of science" (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. 70). The ETP presents Ethiopia's past only as a period of "complex problems the country has plunged in by dictatorial, self-centred and vain regimes" (MOE, 1994, p. 4). This means, while Ethiopia's past is

particularized in light of its “evil” regimes, western experience is presented as a universal and neutral experience, without being tainted with its history of plundering the rest of the world through slavery and colonialism. The ETP prescribes learning as a simple act of diffusing science to the students using a foreign language not spoken in the country. Elementary education employs ethnic standards, guiding the student towards regional language, custom and history. Higher education emphasizes an “international standard”, requiring the use of English to study western content. Elitism stands at the center of the outcome of the ethnicization and internationalization of student identities through education, replacing the notion of *center* the country’s tradition had afforded to students. It operates as a native colonial system that produces the ideology of traditionalism and globalism to justify its power.

The effect of the education system on the lives of Ethiopian students cannot be exhaustively described here. The dismissal of Ethiopian traditional knowledges from the curriculum, the glorification of the innovative spirit of western science, the correlation between science and truth on the one hand, and tradition and myth on the other, the undermining of the country’s history and traditional knowledge, as evidenced in student textbooks, the use of western language for higher education and research: all of these factors give students a strong message that the Ethiopian tradition is primitive and antithetical to modernization. On the basis of this knowledge, the system constructs students as missionaries of change, and promises them power as the reward of knowledge (MOE, 2009a, p. 130). With the denigration of their tradition as backward and primitive, and the exclusion of traditional leaders and institutions from any form of public office, the students take the promise of education very seriously. The identity of missionarism is so strong that they hardly question the relevance of western education in the country. For example, several students I spoke to during my fieldwork opposed the possibility of changing English as a medium of instruction. Although they admitted that the use of English has made it too difficult for them to understand the content of their studies, the fear of becoming backward and isolated from the world appeared more dangerous and threatening to them than failing to understand or master the content of their studies. Alienation from tradition makes students complicit to the epistemic violence of western knowledge.

The epistemic violence of the system affects not only students who become alienated from the knowledge of their societies but also the majority of the people who still depend on tradition as a source of meaning. In Ethiopia, elders, priests and traditional scholars play decisive roles in the social and cultural life of the majority but they are excluded from serving in government offices if they do not have certification from the western school. Consequently, the majority of the rural people are served by young graduates or school leavers who are indoctrinated by the superiority of science and western knowledge over Ethiopian tradition and history. This denies the possibility of developing local wisdom and experience into policy making. Another effect is the denial of recognition and support to traditional school students and their teachers to pursue their studies. Traditional schools are not eligible for government funding. Their students have to leave their parents and travel to distant places in search of a traditional teacher who might be willing to take them for free. During their study, they have to beg for food in order to survive and give manual labor to their teachers. It can be argued that their service is more relevant to the people than modernist graduates, as they serve within local communities as teachers, counselors and healers, often with little to no remuneration. The government gives no support to their educational endeavors, and public resources are funneled only to the western school.

Another effect of epistemic violence is the avoidance of traditional accountability. In Ethiopia, tradition determined the basis of authority and the limit of the exercise of power. Notions of accountability are embedded within traditional beliefs and practices. Although violation of traditional accountability was not uncommon, there were always serious consequences, from lack of support to outright rebellion against the leaders. This meant that kings had to follow traditional rules and respect what the people respected in order to maintain their legitimacy to rule. Power required some balance between the traditional accountability of the leaders and the traditional subjectivities of the people. With the westernization of the state, political power emancipated itself from traditional accountability but maintained the traditional subjectivities of the people. The meaning, worth and role of tradition is subjected to the ideology of elite missionarism and messianism. Due to their alienation from tradition, students continue to disregard the value of learning from the experience of their society.

Epistemic violence also affects students individually, as the loss of Ethiopian traditional values is not often compensated by the fulfilment of modern values associated with western education. The education system fails to achieve its own promises. Low quality education, failure to join university or graduate from it, the use of foreign language as a medium of instruction, the difficulty of finding employment, the existence of informal rules of inclusion and exclusion to benefit from the system such as political or ethnic affiliation, the irrelevancy of the content of education to self-employment or innovation: these are just some of the factors that contribute to alienation. Finally, this failure to achieve a sense of belonging in both traditional and modern systems of identity creates the condition of centerdlessness that allows Elitdom to maintain power through the production of vulnerable identities. Alienation from tradition invites internalization of Eurocentrism and consciousness of power, and alienation from Elitdom leads to powerlessness and meaninglessness. Powerlessness is a condition that develops as students are unable to change how Elitdom is influencing their current and future lives, and meaninglessness is the inability to utilize their education outside Elitdom due to its ineffectiveness and irrelevancy to local life. The combination of these two forms of alienation is defined as centerdlessness. *Centerdlessness* is the inability to anchor one's imagination and effort on a concrete cultural ground, in a place that connects past, present and future lives.

Although the above analysis focuses on the development of a native colonial system and its local consequences in Ethiopia, Elitdom has epistemic and structural links with forces of globalization outside the country. Epistemically, it is related to what Mudimbe called "the western epistemic order" that dominated the African intellectual landscape (1988, p. 1). Structurally, it is supported by institutions and structures that impose rules and displace traditional knowledges and local institutions. These two processes create a homogenous global space for the exercise of a globalized elite power. There are two major ways through which the diversity of local life contained in place, locality or tradition is subjected to the epistemic violence of western knowledge. First, western knowledge presents the local as the opposite of the global, as though the global has no geographical center or location in the world. We think in terms of mega theories that are sanitized from local particularities, and forget the idea that "everything is somewhere and in place" (Aristotle qtd. in Casey,

1993). This thinking is commonly espoused through notions such as “globalization”, “humanity”, and “internationalism” that project a vision of homogenous global space detached from particular places. Traditions are given fixed meanings that support these processes.

Second, epistemic violence against traditions supports the structural and institutional forces whose activities facilitate the destruction of traditions within localized and fixed boundaries. For example, the influence of structural adjustments required by institutions such as the World Bank pressure countries to adopt policies that facilitate the transfer of local resources into market forces that are beyond the control of local people. Investment projects involving the transfer of land to rich investors robs local people of their entire life, as it often results in the loss of social, cultural, spiritual and economic connections they had with their places. From mid-1990s to 2011, Ethiopia transferred 3 –3.5 million hectares of land to investors resulting in “the vulnerabilities of small producers in the rural areas whose lands are increasingly being threatened by expropriation” (Rahmato, 2014, p. 26). However, global measures of growth do not take into account the consequence of the loss of the physical, emotional, cultural and epistemic wealth and relationship people have in and with places. The World Bank’s praise of Ethiopia as a country “With Continued Rapid Growth, ... Poised to Become a Middle Income Country by 2025” does not take into account the impact of land deals which the Bank itself supported (Chavkin, 2015; Hardison, 2015). For local people, to be placeless is more grievous than the loss of the sense of place, as Edward Relph suggested in his idea of *placelessness* (1976). It is above all to suffer destitution within the darker side of modern development.

The Ethiopian education system does not provide information and critical concepts that could allow students to question the above epistemic and structural violence against tradition. In Chapter Six, I have indicated the role of the World Bank in education policy making in Ethiopia and other countries (Takala, 1998). International actors have institutionalized mechanisms for influencing social policy in poor countries through aid and other conditionalities (Samoff, 2013). They have created a homogenous ideological and political space, influencing poor countries with dissimilar social and geographical contexts to adopt similar types of policies, to implement education in similar ways, using similar resources. They support the introduction of technologies that have little relevance

and significance to local life, as the case of teaching rural students in Ethiopia using satellite television in English demonstrated. These approaches mystify students' conceptions of identity and modernity as presented in Chapter Six. It projects a vision of globalism detached from local particularities by institutionalizing the teaching of western knowledge and the English language in higher education as a measure of achieving "international standard".

By focusing on the notion of place rather than space, I seek to illuminate the deceptive face of globalism and call for a corrective approach. From the perspective of the theory of place, the English language and the content of learning are rooted in place, particularly the West. The institutions that influence the policy of education are also just as rooted in places as the concepts and tools of education. The World Bank is a fine example. Its policies and programs reflect market principles that benefit strong western states. The United States has undue influence over the World Bank, even to the extent that the US President nominates the President of the Bank. The institutions and the ideas that the Bank promotes are not hanging in an abstract notion of space that is equally open and reachable to all. Instead, it is rooted in the philosophy and in the interest of particular places in the West. The Bank may procure profit from collecting debt repayments or facilitate the brain drain due to its homogenizing influence. This means, intentionally or unintentionally, it disproportionately allows the flow of benefits not to all places in the global world but to particular places from where it is situated and controlled as an institution. Therefore, what we have as global actors are institutions that have the capacity to transform diverse places into a homogenous space so that they can operate without being hindered by the specificities of those locales. This indicates that the notion of space projects an ideological map constructed based on predetermined theories, formulas, and principles. Traditions as rich sources of knowledge within places of poor countries are regarded as primitive not because that is what they are, but because that is how the global gets its deceptive, all-embracing and all-encompassing face. My argument is not to oppose non-oppressive, intersectional but also multi-central places interacting with each other for cosmopolitan humanity or internationalism. Rather, it argues that the global should be the genuine expression of diverse localities. To this pluriversity, Ethiopia, similar to other places, has contributions to make.

Traditions are important epistemic sources that challenge objectification – the turning of people and nature into things that can be defined, controlled and managed by powerful men to achieve calculable material ends. They resist epistemic violence and are sources of self-definition and renewal. This approach requires the avoidance of traditionalism, the essentialist view of traditions as either barbaric or innocent. Traditions do not belong to a particular stage of life or to a particular race; rather they are constitutive of dynamic contexts that generate new meanings in dialogue with old ones. The failure of education emerges partly from a failure to recognize not just cultural or traditional diversity but also other types of diversities such as metaphysical, epistemological and cognitive diversities (Santos, et al., 2007) which are contained in local traditions. Such diversities should be approached not as neatly separate binaries of oriental vs occidental or traditional vs modern knowledges, but as plural yet interrelated centers of knowledge (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1993). Therefore, my attempt to interpret Ethiopia's traditions is not to provide a strict theoretical formula that explains traditions as they *are*. Instead, it is an attempt to indicate the existence of silenced sources of knowledge that could contribute to epistemic principles for relevant education in the country. To this end, I propose that the Ethiopian tradition interpreted in Chapter 2 and 3 demonstrates that traditions can work as sources of knowledge to 1) challenge the dominance of the western epistemic order that privileges space over place, and 2) create a common ground with other traditions for the production of relevant knowledge for relevant education.

In challenging the dominance of western epistemology, the Kebra Nagast presents a great insight that makes place the source of meaning and identity. As shown in Chapter 2, the Kebra Nagast regarded Ethiopia not just as a physical entity but also a spiritual one, a sacred inheritance, *yekalkidan hager*, whose independence had to be protected and whose destiny is to be free. I have indicated that although the historical use of covenant often created a sense of othering by referring to outsiders as heathens, in the Ethiopian context the land rather than the people was regarded as sacred. By becoming the “place of habitation” for the Ark of the Covenant, Ethiopia became a seat of mercy for all of its inhabitants. The “mercy seat” provided “the rains and the waters from the sky, for the planted things... and the fruits, for the peoples and the countries, for

the kings and nobles, for men and beasts, for birds and creeping things” (Kebra Nagast, 1932, p. 144). This sanctification of place based on the Ark of the Covenant challenges the epistemic violence that attempts to present place as a mere natural resource that should be converted into cash. Similar perspectives in Oromo, Sidama, Konso and others provide epistemic principles that present place as important sources of identity and meaning. This elevation of place is an important defense against the commercialization of lands, indigenous knowledges and resources. It also suggests an important epistemological contribution for the rethinking of education. It suggests that education cannot ignore the significance of place as we cannot know anything without emplacing it first, and everything has to come from somewhere or to take place somewhere (Casey, 1993). Knowledge requires a context that orients its production and determines its effects. Each context or place has its own historical, cultural, geographical, social, economic, political and spiritual characteristics with important similarities as well as differences with other contexts. These contexts produce *knowledge traditions* that could generate epistemic principles that can relate or unite with one another in multiple ways. The question of how epistemic principles from diverse knowledge traditions should relate with one another is a delicate methodological question that should not be determined by the western epistemic order, lest the outcome could become epistemic violence. It is important to avoid the creation of static and antagonistic boundaries between traditions that could make power the desired or inevitable outcome of the relationship. That means the epistemology of knowledge production should go beyond the view of knowledge as a means to power.

This leads us to the second insight that we can draw from the Ethiopian epistemological tradition: the view of knowledge as wisdom and humility as the end of knowledge. In the traditional education system, knowledge is regarded as the gift of God that can be acquired by the soul as wisdom. Wisdom is regarded as “the eye of the soul ... the High God light that fills the soul” (Sumner, 1981, p. 54). It enables the soul to see, hear, speak and think clearly. From this, education is the training of the soul with wisdom to achieve humility አትህቶተ ፡ ርዕሰ. This goal enhances the relatedness of the individual to place and people, rather than the cultivation of his/her individuality and isolation from the world. To know is to melt the self into the being of the other; to grasp the passion, the

fear, the pain, the blessing and the hope of the other. Modernist arguments consider this to be self-defeating, arguing that it discourages the ego-centric drive that produced science in the West (A. A. Mazrui & Wagaw, 1982). I argue that a humble approach to reality does not create a defenseless being that welcomes oppression and violence. As Ethiopia's victory over European colonialist forces showed, the notion of a sacred place initiated the desire to act in defense of what is just and good beyond the self. Indigenous people all over the world have never accepted dispossession through colonization or development (Bodley, 2008). They have been fighting back using their traditions against the epistemic order that cannot recognize their resistance and resilience outside its own frame. Humility creates the willful passion to make sacrifices for a higher and common good. Although its epistemological and ethical principles are not intentionally designed to oppose the West, it can nevertheless particularize and objectify the West and theorize egocentrism and individualism, as the Ethiopian traditional literature showed. But more importantly, humility as the end of knowledge nurtures non-oppressive and creative dialogue among diverse epistemic traditions within Ethiopia.

Once place and traditions are recognized as sources of knowledge, and humility is accepted as an end to knowledge, the next step is to answer how local traditions could interact with foreign epistemic sources. In particular, how can Ethiopian knowledge traditions interact with western knowledge which contains important lessons and skills for our lives? This question should be addressed in light of the skepticism to the argument that as much as western tradition has been the basis of western education, African traditions could also become the basis of African educations (Hountondji, 1996). I agree that no knowledge could be classified as an eternal property of a certain group. However, as many postcolonial and decolonial thinkers strongly argue, western knowledge has attained a universal position by depicting non-western places as primitive, vacant spaces that can be cultivated by the West, and by working through the structures and institutions of power that made these assumptions a reality (Mignolo, 2011; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013; Said, 1978). Therefore, my interest in approaching local knowledge does not suggest a preoccupation with the authenticity or purity of an African tradition, or the romanticisation and essentialisation of it (Semail & Kincheloe, 1999). Instead, it is a conscious move from preoccupation with spaces of knowledge to

places of knowledge, from the experiences and stories of the powerful to the needs and potentials of particular societies and traditions. It is therefore important to understand western knowledge from the darker side of modernity (Mignolo, 2011), from the epistemic tradition of non-western places and the growing critical literature against its universalist and imperialist nature (Chen, 2010). The purpose is not to accumulate a detailed inventory of the trauma caused by western knowledge but to understand our own position and relationship with it.

The Ethiopian indigenous methodology of *tirguaamme* provides a fundamentally important insight that addresses the question of how to learn from other epistemic sources. As discussed in Chapter 3, *tirguaamme* is a process of inquiry from the traditional education system that examines the hidden essence of a text or reality. It is based on the principle of ንብብ ፡ይቀትል ፡ወትርጓሜ ፡የሃዩ ፡። which literally means “text kills but meaning heals”, suggesting the importance of interpretation over mere translation or imitation. In relation to introducing foreign texts into Ethiopia, *tirguaamme* was particularly led by the principle of *creative incorporation*. As presented in Chapter 3, Ethiopian traditional scholars interpreted various texts from Greek, Latin, Arabic and Judaic sources by using their epistemic tradition as “a filter through which every facet of thought, old or new, had to pass to be accepted, rejected, or modified” (Ullendorff, 1965, p. 139). *Creative incorporation* is the art of interpreting the world from a place, the process of drawing insights from external sources to enrich, activate, and transform a tradition through dialogue with other traditions. In the traditional education system, immersion in Ethiopian epistemic traditions, or centeredness, was a critical precondition for the production of relevant knowledge for the country.

A contemporary use of creative incorporation should consider two important steps. First, it requires a critical and deeper understanding of the principles and patterns of Ethiopian knowledge traditions. As Isaac advised a young Ethiopian scholar:

If we read books written by Machiavelli, Hobbes, Marx, Lenin and Mao, why not those attributed to Kristos Samra, Iyasus Mo'a, Zar'a Ya'eqob, Ewestawos, Onesimos Nasib, and our other ancient writers? Why do we not study Ge'ez poetry and literature? Why do we not study and research the rich oral tradition of the Oromo and other Ethiopian peoples

about human wisdom and political democratic philosophy? Why do we not listen to or learn from our own ordinary village elders about mutual respect, humility of knowledge, and, love of peace and wisdom (2013b).

Isaac's suggestion follows Egwale Gebra Yohannis' advice that current Ethiopian scholars should first "digest and swallow" the knowledge of their society before they incorporate western knowledge to their tradition (2011 [2003 EC], p. 71). The seeds of education are to be chosen primarily on the basis of the nature of the land and the environment, not on the quality of the seed alone which is only secondary to the place. This process should aim at uncovering local epistemic locations that could allow diverse traditions within the country to contribute to the continued use of Ethiopia as a shared spiritual and emotional signifier. Once shared Ethiopian epistemic locations are identified, the second step is to imagine how to interact with other knowledge traditions. For this second step, Egwale Gebra Yohannis presented creative incorporation as the art of grafting a wild shoot onto an olive tree based on the analogical interpretation of Romans Ch. 11 no. 17-18 (2011 [2003 EC], p. 72). He suggested the oil tree that has natural oil represents the Ethiopian knowledge tradition, and the wild shoot represents western knowledge:

በተፈጥሮ ዘይትነት ያለው ዛፍ አለ። ፍሬ ማፍራት ስለተሳነው ቅርንጫፎቹን ይቅርጡአቸዋል። በነሱ ፈንታ አውልዓ ገዳም የምድረ ቦዳ ዛፍ፤ በዘይቱ ግንድ ላይ ተቀጥሎ እንዲያድግ ይተክላሉ። ተቀጽላው የስሩ ህይወት ተካፋይ ስለሚሆን ዘይትነትንም ያገኛል። ግን ፈርቶ መኖር አለበት። በቅርንጫፍነቱ መኩራት አይገባዉም። ምክንያቱም ስር ቅርንጫፍን ይሸከማል እንጂ ቅርንጫፍ ስርን አይሸከም።

The olive tree has its own natural oiliness. Since it failed to bear fruit, they cut its branches off. In replacement, they grafted a new wild shoot to grow on the stem of the tree. Since the grafted shoot partakes in the life of the root, it gets oil. But, it should live in fear [humility]. It should never consider itself superior. Because the root carries the branch not the branch carries the root (2011 [2003 EC], p. 72).

The analogy presents Ethiopian knowledges as a living tree rooted in place but lacks fruits. Although this analogy of a tree that lack fruits does not seem to actually represent Ethiopian knowledge traditions as the latter have produced intellectual, cultural and civilizational fruits, we can still use the story to illustrate how creative incorporation may work now.

The analogy presents western knowledge not as another tree that should replace the olive tree, but as a branch, a fragment that would be grafted “to partake in the life of the root”. It is interesting to note that the outcome of this process is not a purely old or new fruit but a mixture of both.

The practice of learning in the traditional education system shows that creative incorporation creates dynamism to place. It allows exchange and interaction among diverse knowledge traditions through two inter-related ways. These are learning *from* places and learning *to* places. Learning from places entails learning from the internal qualities of a place, from the accumulated legacy that occurred in the past and is stored in the stories, practices and experiences of that place. In the traditional education system, the schools are located at specific places, each with its own peculiarities of excellence. The House of Reading (*Nibab Bet*), the House of Holy Mass (*Kidassie Bet*) and the House of Hymn (*Zema Bet*) could be regarded as examples of learning from place. Students as moving bodies travel to these traditional schools to study the various manuscripts, songs, skills and materials invented or developed by Ethiopian traditional scholars such as Yared, Petros ZeGascha, King Zara Yacob and many others. Places that inhabit historical footprints such as Axum, Lalibela and Harar furnish infinite possibilities for learning from places. This notion of learning can inspire the cultivation of knowledge traditions that exist in Oromo, Konso, Sidama, Tigray, Afar, Amara and other places. There is also learning that is carried *to* places. Ethiopian traditional scholars who incorporated knowledge from Greek, Hebrew, Arabic and other sources brought various forms of learning to their places. It is important to emphasize that learning *from* and *to* places are significantly related to each other. *Tirguaamme* as creative incorporation provides a principle that learning *from* places should guide the process of learning *to* places. To this end, the use of creative incorporation requires a critical, reflexive and dialogical study of traditions, and a process of unlearning and relearning, which can greatly be aided by the traditional view of knowledge as humility.

The traditional education system provides additional insight into the critical potential of traditions. *Hatata*, critical meditation, is a good example of reflective dialogue within and among traditions. *Hatata* is a process of developing critical, rational and independent thought or theory on various philosophical questions. The philosophy of Zara Yacob

and Wolda Hiwot are good examples of this tradition (Sumner, 1976). The two scholars, who were educated in the principles and practices of Ethiopian traditional thought, developed a critical philosophy relevant to their society. This demonstrates that knowledge traditions have critical potentials that can generate transformative knowledge for education. The above theoretical and methodological insights inspire richness and dynamism into Ethiopia's knowledge traditions. Knowledge gains originality or new meaning whenever it is adopted by a new *place*.

This book presents compelling arguments in support of an epistemological and methodological shift that could make education relevant to the people of Ethiopia. Despite the ongoing suppression of indigenous knowledges, Ethiopia still carries the seed of a new epistemic hope for the future. It has a vast population surviving based on diverse knowledge traditions. The only way to defend the people is to support their tradition, which includes their beliefs, experiences, customs, rituals and aspirations. Traditions are rooted, not imprisoned, in history; they are not closed but open to the future. Embracing traditions is not to travel to the past. It is to live in the present of those dispossessed of their right to exist now. However difficult it may seem, the cost of not doing this is the deepening of a colonial consciousness, one that dispossesses people from the place that connects their past, present and future lives.

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